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BIBLE READINGS WITH MY CHILDREN.

BY

MRS. PHILIP COHEN.

"EVEN A CHILD IS KNOWN BY HIS DOINGS,
WHETHER HIS WORK BE PURE AND WHETHER
IT BE RIGHT." *Proverbs xx., 11.*

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TO

MY CHILDREN

THIS BOOK

IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED.

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BIBLE READINGS WITH MY CHILDREN.

CHAPTER I.

THE PHILISTINES AND THE ARK.

1 SAMUEL, iv.

MY dear children, when we left off our stories the other day, I told you that Samuel, as he grew up, became known all over Canaan as a prophet. God continued to be gracious to him, even as He had when Samuel was but a little child learning to serve Him in the Tabernacle, and now that he was a man he loved God more and more. You remember, I hope, how the Lord came and spoke to Samuel in the night, and told him all that was to happen

to the old priest Eli and his family. Well, this was not the only time that God appeared to him and revealed the future. You can easily understand, then, that the people from one end of the land of Israel to the other (that is, "from Dan to Beersheba") saw that Samuel was a true prophet of the Lord, and they had faith in his words.

Now, you will see from the story that I am going to tell you, that the Israelites were foolish enough sometimes to act without coming to Samuel for advice.

It was some years after Samuel's vision when the Philistines, those old enemies of the Israelites, came up from their own country to fight them. You heard so much about the Philistines in the story of Samson, that I hope you do not want me to remind you they were a wicked people who lived in Canaan. They never prayed to God, but to idols, and it vexed them to see the children of Israel serving the true God, and they often quarrelled and fought with them.

Now, of course, if the children of Israel had wished to do the right thing, they would have come to the prophet Samuel, to ask his advice before they went out to fight the Philistines. Instead of this, out they all ran, with their swords, or anything they could find to fight with, against the Philistines. Well, what do you expect to hear happened? Who do you think got the best of it? Not the Israelites, you may be sure, when God felt angry with them, and would not help them. Just see what these silly wicked people did next.

Instead of coming penitent to Eli or Samuel, telling him how sorry they were for their misconduct, they went to the priests, Hophni and Phinehas, the wicked sons of Eli, and asked them to bring the Ark of God out among their tents, for then nothing could prevent them conquering the Philistines. If Hophni and Phinehas had not been sinful men, they would have said, "No; we must not bring the Holy Ark into battle;" but they only thought of pleasing the people and getting presents

from them ; so they did what the people wanted, and took God's Ark from out of the Tabernacle at Shiloh, and brought it down to the place where the children of Israel were waiting to fight the Philistines again. When all the people saw it, they were so delighted, that they shouted again and again, till the sound was echoed back.

I dare say you know what an "echo" is ? There are very few children who have not tried with their little voices to raise one, and if you have not, you must get some of your older friends to show you what I mean.

Well, the Philistines heard both the shouts and the echo, and they asked what it was all about. When they were told that the Israelites had fetched the Ark of God into the camp, they were very frightened.

"Woe unto us !" they said, "God is come into the camp. Who will save us from this God, that did such wonders in the land of Egypt ?"

You see, they remembered all about Pharaoh and the ten plagues. Then some

of the bravest said, "Do not let us be frightened, or the Israelites will make servants of us. We must take courage, and fight like men."

So the battle began, and the ending was just what you might expect. The Ark by itself, holy as it was, brought no good fortune to Israel; for the people trusted in *it* instead of believing in the *God* who had told them to make it.

The Philistines fought well, and the children of Israel had to run away to try and save their lives. Numbers of them got killed. The two sons of Eli died just as the man of God foretold to Eli. But the worst you have not yet heard.

The Ark of God, Israel's treasure, was taken by the Philistines. Now it was *their* turn to shout, and how they gloried over their prize!

And where was Eli all through this long, sad day? Poor old man, he was sitting at the gate of Shiloh, watching for news, "for his heart trembled for the Ark of God." Presently, a man came running towards the

city. Numbers of the people flocked out to hear what news he brought. They feared it could not be good, for he had torn his clothes, and put earth upon his head. In those days people always did like this if they were in sorrow; so that is why to this day many people have a rent made in their clothes when a relation dies. You see it is done in memory of an old Eastern custom.

Now, Eli, who was very old and blind, could not see all this; but he could hear the people's cries, when they heard the messenger tell his sad news. He asked what it all meant, and then the man told him that the Philistines had made the Israelites run away and go back to their tents, that numbers of them were dead, his two sons Hophni and Phinehas had been killed in the battle, and, saddest of all, the Philistines had seized the Ark of God.

When Eli heard these last words, he was so overcome with grief that he fell back by the side of the gate, and broke his neck, and died at once, "for he was an old man

and heavy.”* He was ninety-nine years old. He had judged Israel for forty years.

Are you not sorry to hear of such a sad ending to Eli's life? But it was kinder of God to punish him then than after his death, because you may be sure he went to heaven, as he was a good man in all he did, except not punishing his children when they were young. We must hope that God was able to forgive them too, after He had punished them. God does not like to have to be angry. He has so much love for you all, His children, that it pleases Him, oh, so much more, to be able to reward than punish you; so do try with all your might, dear children, to deserve and earn His love.

* 1 SAMUEL, iv., 18.

CHAPTER II.

DAGON.

1 SAMUEL, v., vi.

ARE you not very anxious to hear what the Philistines did with the Ark? I will tell you. They knew, of course, that it was something the Israelites considered very precious, so they thought the best thing would be to take it to the house where their own god, Dagon, was kept. You have never heard of Dagon. He was an idol, an image that the Philistines worshipped as a god. So this Dagon had a house all to himself—a temple, as we should call it. There the Ark of God was brought, and placed by the side of the idol. In the morning, when some of the Philistines went into Dagon's house they were very sur-

prised to see that their god Dagon had fallen down upon his face before the Ark. They thought this was an accident, so they took their god, lifted him up, and set him in the old place again.

Do you think it was an accident? No, I am sure you know better. But these foolish Philistines could not read the lesson that God was teaching them—the difference between the holy and the unholy thing, so see what happened next.

The following morning, when again some of the people went into the house of Dagon, a much more surprising sight was waiting for them. Not only had their god again fallen upon his face to the ground before the Ark, but his head and his hands were cut off and lying on the floor beside him.

When the Philistines saw this they were amazed and frightened, but still they did not think of giving the Ark back to the Israelites.

Then God sent a plague, and numbers of the Philistines got ill and died. What do you think they did then? They thought

they would get rid of this Ark, which brought such unpleasant things upon them. So they took the Ark and carried it to another Philistine city. No sooner was this done than the same thing happened there—horrible sickness came upon the people, and a great many of them died.

Then they sent the Ark on to another city. When the people of this other city saw the Ark brought on to them, they were very angry and frightened too, they cried out, "Here is the Ark of the God of Israel brought to us, we shall all die like they have in the other places."

Then they sent for some of their great men or lords and begged them, "Oh, send away the Ark to its proper place in Israel, for it only brings death and trouble to us."

Surely enough they were right, for illness broke out among the people, and their cries were heard all through the city. So the Philistines called for their priests and wise men to ask them, "What shall we do with the Ark of God? Tell us how we shall send it back to its place."

So they answered them, "Send the Ark back, for the God of Israel is angry with you, and send with it an offering of gold. What is the use of your hardening your hearts like the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? After all their plagues, you know, they were obliged to let the children of Israel go. This is how you shall send it back: Have a new cart made, and take two cows that have young calves; tie the cows to the cart, but leave their calves at home away from them. Then take the Ark of the Lord and lay it upon the cart, and put the jewels of gold that you are sending for a sin offering, in a box by the side. Then leave the cows to go whichever way they like; if they go on the way to Israel it shall be a sign to us that this trouble has been sent as a punishment for our keeping the Ark, but if the cows do not take that road, then we shall know that all this was only a chance."

The men did as they were told; they found two cows that gave milk, tied them to the cart, shut up their calves at home, and laid the Ark and the offering on the cart.

Well, you know, dear children, if you want to lead a cow to a particular place, all you need do is to take her calf on and she will be sure to follow; so now see what a wonderful thing this was that happened.

As soon as the Ark was laid on the cart the cows started off in the most contented fashion, lowing on the way, and never turned to the right hand nor the left, until they came to one of the cities of Israel. Some of the Philistine lords had followed the cart to see how it would end. Presently they reached a field where some Israelites were gathering in the ripe wheat, for it was harvest time. When the men lifted up their eyes and saw the Ark of God, they were indeed rejoiced, and hurried forward to meet it.

CHAPTER III.

THE ARK ; OR, WICKED CURIOSITY.

1 SAMUEL, vi., vii.

Now, there was a great stone in the field to which the Philistines had brought the Ark. So some of the men who were Levites (that is, belonging to the tribe of Levi), took hold of the Ark and lifted it, and the offering of gold on to this great stone. Then, they took the wood of the cart, and offered up the two cows as an offering to God. You see they made the stone serve as an altar. The people were so thankful to get the holy Ark back among them, that they wanted to show God their gratitude by making Him an offering.

When the Philistine lords had seen this,

back they went to their own country. I think they were as glad to be rid of the Ark, as the Israelites were to have it back again. You can take a lesson from this, my dear children. We are seldom happy when we have anything that is not ours by right, but belongs to some one else ; we may not fall ill and suffer like the Philistines, but we are sure to feel very miserable ; we must listen to the small still voice of conscience, which *will* make itself heard sooner or later.

After the Philistines had left the Ark with the Israelites, some of the people did a very wrong thing. You know that Moses had told the people to keep the Ark in the Sanctuary, only the tribe of Levi was allowed to serve there, no one belonging to any of the other tribes might even touch any of the holy things. Well, I am sorry to tell you that whilst the Ark was on the great stone in the field, some of the people were disobedient enough to come and look into it.

God punished them instantly, and

numbers died. The people were very frightened and sad.

“Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?” they said. They need not have asked this question. As long as you obey His commands, you will never be afraid to stand before Him. But no wonder they were afraid, after disobeying such a direct command, so they sent to the people of another city, saying, “The Philistines have brought again the Ark of the Lord, come ye down and fetch it up to you.” *

So some of the men went and fetched it from off the great stone where the Levites had set it up, and brought it to the other place, to a house where some of the priests lived, and it remained with them for twenty years.

Do you know who was judging Israel all this time? Samuel, the same Samuel who was taken to the Tabernacle by his mother, Hannah, when he was a little child, and brought up there by Eli, the High Priest.

Samuel was a very wise good man, and it grieved him to see his people sin, for they often forgot God and served idols like the Philistines did, so Samuel talked to them and begged them to put away their false gods and to "serve the Lord only."

The Israelites knew that Samuel was right, so they owned it at once, and said, "We have sinned against the Lord."

Then Samuel prayed to God for the people who were in trouble just then, for their old enemies, the Philistines, were fighting them again. But God listened to Samuel's prayers, and when the battle began between the Israelites and Philistines, the Philistines got the worst of it, and had to run away, and, what is more, they never came again to fight Israel as long as Samuel lived.

Samuel did not remain in one place all the year round, but went about to different cities, to judge the people, and to teach them what was right and wrong, to settle disputes, and do all he could to make them happy, as most of the judges had done and

as Moses did in the Wilderness, and other good men, who followed his example after his death. How good it was of Samuel to give up his time to the people, it would have been a much easier, pleasanter way of spending it, if he had remained quietly at home, amusing himself, for he had a beautiful house of his own at a place called "Ramah;" but you see he was unselfish, and only thought of what would be best for others, rather than for himself. After hearing this, you will be the more surprised at something I am going to tell you in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REBELLIOUS WISH.

1 SAMUEL, viii.

AT this time all the other nations, except Israel, had kings. You have heard of the King of Egypt, of the King of Moab, of the King of Ai, but you have never yet heard of a "King of Israel." The Israelites had not wanted one, because God had always been their King or Ruler, and how could they have so good a one as the Lord?

But now, these foolish people thought they would like to be the same as the other nations they saw around them, so they came to their wise old judge, Samuel, and said to him, "Make us a king to rule us like all the nations." Samuel was very

displeased at their asking him this, but he did not know how to answer the people yet, so he prayed to the Lord.

Do you think God would refuse their request? No. He said to Samuel, "Listen to all that they say to you, *you* need not be vexed, it is not *you* that they have rejected, but *me*; they do not wish me to reign over them. They shall have a king, but you shall show them the sort of man he will be."

And Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who had asked him to give them a king. He said, "This is the sort of king that shall reign over you. He will take your sons for himself to be horsemen for his chariots, and some to run before them, and some shall be his servants to work in his fields and gather in his harvests. Your daughters he will take to cook and bake for him. He will grow rich by making you poor, for he will take the best of your fields and olive yards and vineyards; also your asses when he wants them to do his work. In a word, you will

be his servants. Then you will cry out because of the king that you have chosen you, but the Lord will not hear in that day."

Can you believe when the people heard this, they were still wicked enough to refuse to obey Samuel's voice?

"Nay, but we will have a king over us," they said, "we will be like the other nations; we will have a king we can see, who will go out and fight our battles."

And a king they should have, the Lord said, and He would choose him for them, through His faithful servant, Samuel. How this was done, you shall hear in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V.

SAUL, THE FIRST KING.

1 SAMUEL, ix., x.

Now there was a man in Israel named Kish. One day some of his asses were lost, so he called his son to him, and said he must go with one of the servants and try to find them. This son was called Saul. So Saul and the servant started off to look for the asses. Far and near they searched, but the asses were not to be found, till at last Saul thought that his father would be getting anxious about him, so he told the servant they had better return home. They were by this time near the city where Samuel lived. Now the servant had heard what a wise prophet Samuel was, so he said to the young man Saul, "There is a man of God

living near here; let us go and ask his advice, perhaps he may put us in the right way to find the asses."

Saul thought the servant's idea a very good one, so he answered his servant, "Well said; come, let us go."

Then they went to the city where Samuel, the "man of God," was living. When the city was reached they had to find the prophet's house, and, seeing an old man, they went up to him to inquire the way to it. Strange enough, this very man happened to be Samuel; but, I dare say, dear child, you will have sense enough to see it was not so very strange. Just as God led Abraham's faithful old servant to Rebekah, so He now brought Saul direct to Samuel. On each occasion you must see it was not *chance*, but God's special directing.

The very day before this, God had spoken to Samuel, and told him that on the next morning He would send him the man whom He intended for King over Israel. So, when Saul came near to Samuel to inquire the way, God said to him, "Behold the man of

whom I spoke to you; this same shall reign over my people."

And Samuel said to Saul, "I am the prophet; come home with me and stay until to-morrow, for I must speak to you."

Samuel knew all about the asses being lost, so before Saul had time to ask him about them, he told him not to trouble about the asses, for they were found. Then Samuel took Saul and the servant home to his house, and made them sit down to a feast with some of his friends. After this, Samuel took Saul to the top of his house, and talked with him alone.

The next morning they rose early, and Samuel told Saul he was now to go home to his father, but the servant was to pass on before, as he wished to show him the word of God.

Samuel then took some of the holy oil, such as the priests used, and poured it over Saul's head, then he kissed him, and said, "The Lord hath anointed thee King over His people."

Samuel told him to go home, but not to

repeat to any one about this, and by-and-bye he would come to him and tell him what to do. So Saul returned to his own people, but not a word did he say about having been anointed by Samuel to be King. Time passed on, until Samuel called all the people together to a place called Mizpeh, that they might rejoice over the King whom God had given them. Again Samuel told them that, although God granted their wish, He was angry with them. Still the people did not ask him to beg God to be their King instead of any one else. They were determined to have a King, so Saul was brought forward.

Saul was very tall and handsome. As he stood among the people, he was higher than any one of them, and Samuel said, "See ye him, whom the Lord has chosen, that there is none like him among the people?"

And the people shouted and said, "God save the King."

After this they all went home to their own houses, and Saul was King over Israel.

CHAPTER VI.

SAUL'S DISOBEDIENCE.

1 SAMUEL, xii., xiii., xv.

ALTHOUGH the Israelites had grieved and displeased Samuel by wishing for a king, he still loved them so well that he often talked to them, and tried to keep them from being wicked, by reminding them of all that God had done for them, and how He had helped them against their enemies. He told them he should never leave off praying for them, teaching them the good and right way. Listen to Samuel's words: "Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for think what great things He hath done for you."

Saul heard these words as well as the people; so it ought to have been easy for him to be faithful, and obey all God's com-

mands; but I am sorry to tell you after he had been king about two years, he began to sin; he grew disobedient, and thought he knew what was right as well as Samuel; so God was displeased with him.

He was a brave, clever captain, always ready to lead the people out to fight against their enemies (and they had plenty living all round Canaan); so they were very proud of their king, and quite satisfied as yet with him.

Now there were some very wicked people just outside of Canaan, called the Amalekites. I forget if I have spoken of them to you before. God wished them all to be destroyed, so he sent Samuel to Saul with this message: "I remember what the Amalekites did to Israel when they came up from being slaves in Egypt; how, instead of helping them, they fought them when they were weak and sad. Now, take your soldiers, and go, kill them all, men, women and children. Do not spare even their cattle, but destroy everything."

Now, perhaps, you little children may

say, "What a cruel order!" so I must tell you that the Amalekites were not to be destroyed just because they had been unkind and treacherous to the Israelites some time ago, but because they were such a terribly wicked people that God knew their example was dangerous to everyone else. All that they did was sinful, and if they had been allowed to live, the Israelites and other nations would have followed their example, and so in time might have become just as wicked; so God knew it was right and best for them all to be destroyed. Now, you see, it was not an act of revenge, as you might have thought at first.

I told you that Saul was a very brave man. So this order to go out with his soldiers to fight was quite a pleasant one; but, unfortunately, as you will see, he only obeyed that part of the command which suited him. Gladly enough he called his soldiers together, and went forth proudly at the head of them, and wherever Amalekites were to be found, Saul and his

soldiers followed them up and slew them. But their king Agag he would not kill; he thought it would look grand to bring him back to show the people. Besides this, all the finest and strongest oxen and the fattest sheep he saved, only the poor, sickly and thin ones he destroyed. Saul ought to have known that riches got by disobedience to God could do him no good, and you will see how soon he was obliged to own this.

That very night Samuel heard God's voice, saying, "He was sorry that He had made Saul king, as he would not follow His commands."

"And it grieved Samuel, and he cried to the Lord all night." But this time Samuel's prayers were of no use. Saul's daring disobedience in the sight of all the people was such a bad example, that it must be punished. The next morning Samuel got up early, and went out to meet Saul. When the king saw the old prophet coming towards him, he said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have followed the commandment of the Lord."

You know this was not true; but Saul hoped that Samuel did not. This shows you the difference between prophets and other men. As I think I told you before, God gave them the power both of knowing sometimes what was going to happen, and at other times they knew things that had taken place without any one telling them of it. God sent them this knowledge.

You will see now, again, how one sin leads you on to another; for Saul tried to hide his disobedience by a lie; but Samuel was not to be deceived; so he answered Saul, "What means this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and lowing of oxen that I hear?"

Now look at Saul's meanness. Instead of confessing his fault, he tries to throw the blame on his soldiers. "The people have spared of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the Lord thy God; the rest we have utterly destroyed."

Not a word, you see, about Agag, the king. Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stay; I will tell thee what the Lord said to me last

night. The Lord took you, and made you king over His people. He told you to go and utterly destroy the Amalekites, because they were wicked, and had behaved cruelly to His people of Israel. Why, then, did you not obey the voice of the Lord?"

Still Saul tried to excuse himself by saying it was the people who had saved the cattle. Then Samuel said to him, "Is God as pleased with offerings as with obedience? To obey is better than sacrifices. You have forgotten God. Now He will forget you, and choose some one else for king."

At last Saul got frightened—not penitent even now, I am afraid—and he begged Samuel to forgive him and pray to God for him; but Samuel would not. He told him God would not alter His word, and as he turned to go away from him, Saul caught hold of Samuel's robe, and it was torn. Then Samuel said to him, "This is a sign that the Lord has torn the kingdom from you this day, and has given it to your neighbour, who is better than you."

When Saul heard this he again begged

Samuel not to leave him, but to pray with him before the people. This was not because he felt sorry for his sin; but he did not want the people to know how angry God was with him. You can see, I hope, dear children, that this was not penitence. Saul was not sad because he had done wrong, but because he was getting punished for it. If he had been, God might, perhaps, even now have forgiven him, and given him another trial. Our loving Father would so much rather be able to forgive than punish us.

Then Samuel told Saul to bring forward the king of the Amalekites, whom he had saved alive. This Agag was a very wicked, cruel man. He had never spared anyone, not even women or children. So when he came before Samuel, the old prophet took a sword, and slew him there before Saul. Then Samuel went away to his own city, and never saw Saul again.

Do you know, I pity Samuel very much. He had a great deal to be sad about. He had been so good and kind a judge to the

people, yet they were ungrateful enough to get tired of him, and murmur for a king. God gave them a king; then think what a grief it must have been to Samuel to see him turn out so badly! He was not angry, but oh, so sad! He *mourned* for Saul. Do you not hope the next king was a better one? You shall soon hear about him.

CHAPTER VII.

DAVID, THE YOUNG SHEPHERD.

1 SAMUEL, xvi.

AFTER Samuel had been grieving some time for Saul, God spoke to him, and said, "You have mourned long enough for Saul; fill your horn with oil and go. I will send you to Jesse, who lives at Bethlehem; for I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

Samuel was rather afraid when he heard this command, as he thought Saul would kill him if the news should reach his ears. However, God told him that no harm should happen to him, but he was to go to Bethlehem to sacrifice, and call Jesse and his sons to see the offering made, and He would point out which of them was to be anointed.

Samuel did just as God told him. He went to Bethlehem, and when the people found that he was going to sacrifice to the Lord, numbers of them gathered round him. Amongst them were Jesse and his sons. Then Samuel told Jesse to come up near to him with his sons, and he looked at the eldest. He was tall and fine-looking; so Samuel thought, This must be the man I am to anoint as king! Samuel could not see into his heart; only God could do that, you know, and this man's heart was not beautiful ~~like~~ his face; so, when Samuel said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him,"

God said, "Look not on his face, nor on his height; for this is not the one I have chosen. The Lord does not see as man sees; man looks to the outward appearance, but God looks to the heart."

What beautiful words these are! The poor little cripple, the child with the ugly scarred face is often more loved by God than the handsome healthy one, because you see God looks to the heart, and the

heart and the face do not always match. Remember, God sees your heart, dear child; so try and keep it pure and bright to meet God's searching eye.

When God told Samuel that Jesse's eldest son was not the one to be anointed, Samuel told Jesse he wished to see the others. So Jesse made his second son pass before Samuel, and then the third, and so on, until Samuel had seen seven fine tall young men; but the right one had not yet appeared; so Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord hath not chosen these. Are all your children here?"

Then Jesse said, "I have still one more, the youngest; he takes care of the sheep."

And Samuel said, "Send and fetch him; he must come here."

So Jesse sent and fetched his youngest son to Samuel. Now he was only a lad. He had a rosy, beautiful bright face, that everyone loved to look at; but, besides this, he had a good heart, and that was why God chose him, instead of his tall, fine elder brothers. The little lad's name was

David. I dare say, dear children, you have already heard of him ; perhaps, even, you have learnt some of his beautiful hymns of praise, "Psalms," as they are called ; for David loved God so well that he used to write down his praise of Him in sweet poetry, and these writings of David have been put together and form one of the books in the Bible called "Psalms." Some of these Psalms are very sad ones, others again are quite joyful ; for David was thinking of God at all times, and you will see as you get on further in his history, that his life was happy and sad—sad and happy, like most of ours are.

As soon as David came, God said to Samuel, " Arise ! anoint him, for this is the one I choose."

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and poured it over David's head in the sight of his father and brothers ; and God gave some of His holy spirit to David, so that he grew wiser and better from that day forward.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TROUBLED SPIRIT AND THE YOUNG
MUSICIAN.

1 SAMUEL, xvi.

Now, although David had been anointed by Samuel, he was not yet to reign over the people. He was not old enough, nor wise enough. God would prepare him; for the Israelites were to have a good king when Saul should die.

So little David went back and took care of his sheep, and he remained with them until something happened, which I must tell you about.

After God had chosen David, and had given him some of His holy spirit, Saul grew very miserable. It was not because

he knew that David had been anointed to be king in his place; for God kept that knowledge from him at present, or he would have been very angry, and have tried to kill David.

Well, as I said, Saul was very unhappy; "a bad spirit troubled him." Can you tell me what this bad spirit was?—his wicked conscience. Although he was rich and had plenty of servants to do all that he wanted, he was miserable; nothing pleased him. See what it is to disobey God! Then one of his servants, who felt sorry for him, said, "Let us try to find someone who can play beautiful music; then, when you hear the sweet sounds, your unhappy thoughts may leave you, the evil spirit may depart, and you will feel better."

Saul thought this a good plan; so some of his servants went to find someone who could make sweet music. Now, who do you think they brought back? Somebody said to Saul, "I have heard that Jesse, who lives in Bethlehem, has a son who plays beautifully on the harp. Besides this, he is

very brave and sensible, and has a beautiful face, and the Lord is with him."

So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, saying, "Send me David, your son, who is a shepherd."

No doubt Jesse thought it would be a grand thing for his son to be noticed by the king; so he sent David off directly with a present for Saul. Perhaps you feel curious to know what this present was; so you shall hear. A bottle of wine, a little kid, and some bread. Not a very grand present, you will say, to send to a king; but, remember, Jesse was only a poor man. When Saul saw David, he was very pleased with him, and he soon got to love him greatly, and presently he made him his armour-bearer.

Now, in those days when people went out to fight, they covered their bodies well over with armour. I will tell you what armour is, in case you have never seen any, as no one wears it now-a-days. Armour is a sort of case or covering for a man's body, made of steel, or some other

metal. Not very comfortable to wear, I think I hear you say; but it often saved them from getting killed. The kings and great captains always had someone to carry their armour, until they wanted to put it on, and this person was called the "armour-bearer." Now you see what David would have to do when he became Saul's "armour-bearer."

The next time when the "bad spirit" came upon Saul, David took his harp and played sweet music to him, and very likely he sang some of his beautiful Psalms or hymns of praise that I told you about; so that Saul felt comforted and well, and the bad spirit left him, and after a time he let David return to his father, and once again he took care of the sheep.

CHAPTER IX.

GOLIATH, THE GIANT.

1 SAMUEL, xvii.

WE have not heard anything of the Philistines for a long while, but now once more they came up to fight against the Israelites, so Saul called his soldiers together and went forth with them to meet the Philistines and see who would win the day.

Now, the Philistines had in their army an immense giant. A giant, I dare say you know from your fairy tales, is a person unnaturally taller and bigger than other people. This giant was called "Goliath, of Gath." He was enormously tall and strong, and, to make him look the more terrible, he was covered all over from head

to foot with thick "armour" made of brass, so he must have looked very awful in his brass coat and his brass leggings, and a high hat, or "helmet," as it was called, of the same metal. Besides this, he had a huge shield, which a certain man carried, to hold in front in case any one tried to strike him.

Every day, for forty days, did the giant Goliath come out and walk proudly in front of the Israelite soldiers' tents, asking, in a loud voice, "Will one of you come out and see which of us can fight the best?"

This was all very well for the giant, but naturally the Israelites were afraid of risking their lives with this monster.

So the days went by; Goliath was always mocking the Israelites for their want of courage, and still not one of them dared accept his offer to fight, for there was no giant to be found in Saul's army.

Now I told you that David had gone back to take care of his sheep. One day his father, Jesse, called to him and said, "I wish you would leave the sheep for a little while, one of the servants can look after

them, and you go to the camp and see how your brothers are getting on (David's three eldest brothers had joined Saul to help him against the Philistines); you shall take your brothers some dried corn and some loaves; they will be glad of that, and you may take besides sixteen cheeses as a present to their captain."

So David got up early the next morning, took all the things his father had told him to, put them in a cart, and drove off to the place where Saul's and the Philistines' soldiers had fixed their tents. He soon found his brothers, and they were very glad to see him and hear all the news from the dear ones left at home. Whilst they were talking together out came Goliath, speaking the same words that he uttered every day, and David heard them.

Now, all the soldiers were so frightened when they saw the giant that they ran away, and they told David how even the brave Saul dared not fight him; but they said, "Do you know, if any one could kill him, the king would make him very rich,

and would give him his own daughter for a wife."

When David heard this he stood very quiet, thinking to himself, "I wonder if God would help me; if so, I am sure I could kill him, although he is so big."

When his eldest brother found he had got the idea in his head of fighting the terrible giant, he was quite angry with him. He said, "Why did you come down to the camp? You should have remained with the sheep. How can you be so proud as to imagine you would have a chance against the giant!"

But David would not give up the thought. He was not proud, but he began to feel sure that God was with him, so he talked to the people of his wish to fight Goliath. Some of the soldiers went and told Saul of the little shepherd lad with the brave heart; and the king sent for him. When David came to Saul's tent, and the king looked at him, he, like David's brother, felt afraid for such a lad to fight the Philistine warrior; but David said, "Let no one be afraid of

this Philistine, thy servant will go and fight him ! ”

Saul said, “Thou art not able to go and fight against this Philistine, for thou art but a lad now, and he has been a man of war from his youth.”

Then David answered Saul, “Thy servant kept his father’s flocks, and once a lion, and another time a bear, came out to them. The lion took a lamb away from the flock. I went after him and took the lamb from the lion’s mouth ; then the lion rose against me, but I caught him by his beard and killed him. I also killed the bear. This wicked Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has mocked the soldiers of God. My God, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, He will save me from the hands of this Philistine.”

When Saul heard these brave, modest words, he felt that God would help David, so he answered him, “Go, and the Lord be with thee.”

Then Saul took his own armour and put

it on David, and he tied his own sword round David's waist. But David had not been accustomed to move about in a heavy coat of armour and a high brass helmet, so naturally he felt uncomfortable in them, and he told Saul he would rather fight in his own clothes that he wore every day. So he put off Saul's armour, dressed himself as before, and, only taking his shepherd's "staff" (or stick) in his hand, he went out to meet Goliath. On his way he passed a little stream of water, here he stopped, stooped down and picked out five smooth stones. These he put into the little shepherd's bag, which hung at his side to carry his food in. He had besides in his hand a sling, and with no sword or arms of any kind, David drew near the great giant. Now, when Goliath looked about and saw David he despised him, for all he saw was a young lad, fair, and rosy looking. He did not know this was God's soldier he would have to fight against, so Goliath said, "Am I a dog that you come to fight me with a stick?" And the Philistine cursed him in

the name of his gods, and he said to David, "Come to me, and I will soon give your body to the birds to peck, and the wild beasts of the field shall feast on it."

Still David felt no fear. He said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and a spear and a shield, but I come to you in the name of the Lord God of Hosts, whose soldiers you have mocked. This day God will deliver you into my hand, and I shall cut off your head, and your body shall be food for the beasts of the field, to show that there is a God in Israel. And all here will see that our God does not save with the sword and the spear, for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."

The giant was very angry at these words, and he came yet nearer to David. David ran forward to meet him; then he put his hand into his bag, drew out one of the five stones, placed it in the sling, and in another moment he had thrown it before him, so that it struck the giant's forehead, the stone sank in, and Goliath fell to the

ground like a dead man. David took the giant's sword and cut off his head with it.

Who had killed Goliath? Not David, but God in reality. David, with his brave, faithful young heart, was only God's tool, working out his Master's will. When you see a beautiful picture you do not say what a clever brush painted that, but you think to yourself what a skilful hand must have been at work guiding the brush; and so it was with David. He was brave, yet, humble, trusting in God, therefore God chose him to work out His wishes. If we are good and brave we can often work out God's will, so let us try to make ourselves fit to be God's servants. This ought to be our highest wish in life.

CHAPTER X.

DAVID, THE MODEST CONQUEROR.

1 SAMUEL, xvii., xviii.

WHEN the Philistines saw their famous soldier fall down before the Hebrew shepherd lad, a great fear came upon them ; they scarcely waited to see David marching along with Goliath's head, which he cut off and stuck on the giant's own sword, but they all began running away. Then the men of Israel gave one great shout, and followed them, and numbers of the Philistines got killed.

The Philistines had been in such a hurry that they did not wait to carry their tents off with them, so when the Israelites returned to the camp, they found plenty of

rich and useful things left behind there, which they took for themselves, as this was always allowed in war time. You can fancy the Israelites were all very delighted with David, as they owed all this to his bravery; besides, he had not been idle after killing the giant, but had gone out with the soldiers to help them, when they followed the Philistines as they ran away.

Saul had quite forgotten David's face, for it was some time since he had been fetched to play the harp to the king, so when David came into Saul's tent, bringing the head of Goliath, Saul asked him, "Whose son art thou?"

David answered, "I am the son of Jesse who lives in Bethlehem."

Then Saul said to the captain of the army, "Do not let David go home again to his father; we must keep him with us, as he is so brave, and make him an officer in our army."

Now, some people would have altered, and grown so proud and disagreeable at such a sudden change in their way of

living; for just think how different it all was now for David. Instead of being a shepherd, out in any weather, tending sheep, very often tired, and perhaps sometimes hungry, now we find David one of Saul's captains, the pet and darling of the soldiers! For had *he* not done what none of them had dared to, and so saved them all from their old enemies the Philistines?

Even the women showed their delight by coming out to meet him; playing music and dancing round him. This was not all; they sang "Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands."

Can you believe that when Saul heard these words, the "evil spirit" came back to him, and he felt jealous of the brave young David. He did not like the people to praise David more than they did himself, and he was so annoyed, that one day, when David was playing the harp to quiet and soothe the king, Saul took a javelin (that is a short spear) and threw it at David to kill him. Fortunately, David saw it coming, so he moved aside, and the javelin stuck in

the wall instead of in David's head, where Saul had intended it to go.

Then Saul was afraid of David, for he saw that God was with him. So Saul thought to himself, I will send David out, whenever I can, to fight, and perhaps he will get killed in battle, and so I shall be rid of him, and he told David, if he would fight bravely for him, he would give him his eldest daughter for a wife. But David was so modest and humble, he thought such a reward would be too great an honour for him, so he said to Saul, "Who am I, that I should be the king's son-in-law?"

When, presently, Saul's daughter was given to someone else for a wife, David was not disappointed. Do you know why? Saul had a second daughter, named Michal, and David loved her, and he hoped he might by and bye win her. Some one told Saul about this, and it pleased him, for he thought he would set David such a hard task, that he would die in trying to do it, so he said, "If David can kill one hundred

Philistines, he shall have Michal for a wife."

David was so pleased to hear this, and soon, word was brought to Saul, that not one, but two hundred Philistines had been slain. Then Saul could no longer keep back the promised reward, and Michal, whom David loved, became his wife; and the people were all pleased, for they loved David more and more, because he behaved so wisely and was not proud to them, and they saw that God was with him.

But Saul grew more afraid of David, and now began to treat him as an enemy.

CHAPTER XI.

DAVID AND JONATHAN, THE LOVING FRIENDS.

1 SAMUEL, xviii., xix., xx.

I HAVE already spoken to you of Saul's two daughters, but now you must hear of a son he had. Whilst I think about him, I feel that I want you, dear children, to love him; for he was so good, and brave, and affectionate. His name was Jonathan.

Jonathan was in his father's tent, when David came in, carrying Goliath's head, and directly he looked at David and heard him speak his modest fearless words, Jonathan felt in his heart that this must be his friend, and from that moment to the day of his death, he loved David "as his own soul." You must not think that the love was all

on Jonathan's side ; for David's heart was as full of love for Jonathan, as Jonathan's was for David. They made a promise to each other, that no one should ever step in between them, and make them enemies. Then Jonathan wished to show David that he thought there was no difference between a king's son and a poor shepherd ; so he took off his own robe, and made David wear it ; and besides this he gave him his sword, his bow, and his girdle, or sash.

Now, when Jonathan saw that his father's heart had turned against David, and that he hated him, he was deeply grieved, and he made up his mind that if he could save David, no harm should ever come to him from his father's hands. So when Jonathan heard Saul say that he would kill David, what did he do but go at once and tell David to get out of Saul's way, and this time his life was safe.

But Jonathan was not content with warning David to keep away from Saul. He knew that David was too brave to be happy if he had always to be hiding ; so

Jonathan made up his mind to speak to his father.

Early the next morning, as Saul was walking out in the field, Jonathan went to him and said, "Why do you sin against David? He has never done you any harm. On the contrary, he has always behaved well, and has been a most faithful servant. Did he not run the chance of losing his life when he fought with Goliath, only the Lord helped him, so that all Israel was saved from the Philistines? All the people love him, so how can you think of killing him?"

These were bold words for a son to use to his father, and that father a king, who might in a minute order him to be shut up in prison, or killed; but you know I told you that Jonathan was brave as well as good and loving.

Do you see, dear children, that there are different kinds of bravery? You can easily see that David was very brave, when he went out to fight the giant, but do you know that Jonathan was just as brave now, when he

went to the king and had the courage to tell him he was doing wrong in hating David and trying to kill him. You can all show bravery at times. If you see any of your young companions doing what you know is wrong, remember Jonathan, and try to persuade them to do what is right, make him your hero, imitate him, and you will be sure to please your Father in heaven.

Jonathan's brave words saved David's life. Saul loved his son; so he listened to his advice, and promised, "As the Lord liveth, David shall not be slain."

Then Jonathan went to David's hiding-place, to tell him all about it, and the two dear friends were once more happy, and Jonathan brought David back to Saul, and all went on well for a time, until Saul's "evil spirit" came again to him, with the old feeling of jealousy. But David was not frightened, although the king sat as before, with his javelin in his hand.

David hoped if he played on his harp that Saul would soon be well again; and

soon the sound of sweet music was heard ; but this time the evil spirit was not driven away, and Saul again tried to kill David with the javelin. David managed to move on one side ; so he did not get hurt, and the javelin sank into the wall.

CHAPTER XII.

DAVID AND MICHAL.

1 SAMUEL, xix., xx.

AFTER Saul had tried the second time to kill David with the javelin, you can imagine David did not think it safe to remain near the king; so he went home to his wife Michal, and told her what had happened. She was very frightened, and she said to David she was sure her father meant to kill him, and he must run away. Not very easy to do so, you will say, when I tell you that the king's servants were waiting outside of David's door to slay him as he came out; so you shall hear what David's loving wife did. First of all, she got a strong rope, tied it round David's

body, and so let him down from the window, just like I told you Rahab did with the spies, when they were in Jericho. Then Michal dressed up an image, and laid it in David's bed, and pretended it was he lying there ill; for, sure enough, in the morning Saul's servants came to take David.

"He is ill," said Michal.

"Then if he is too ill to get up, bring him to me in his bed, for I *will* kill him," was Saul's answer.

So the servants went up to David's bedroom; but, as you know, no David was there. Instead of him, they found a figure lying in the bed; and so again David's life was spared.

Saul was very angry with his daughter Michal; but I know you will agree with me in thinking her a very clever woman. She loved David, as everyone did except Saul. Perhaps by this time Saul had got to know that God meant David to be the king by-and-bye, and this made his jealousy grow more and more.

Where do you think David went to

when he had to run away in such a hurry from his home, and leave his wife, who was so fond of him?

To the good old prophet, Samuel, and he told him all that Saul had done to him. Samuel comforted him. He told him not to fear—that God would be with him, and although he might have to bear trouble now, his life should be safe, and all would be well for him by-and-bye.

I should like you to notice, dear children, how most of the very good people you hear of, had to bear trouble some part of their lives. Just look at Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and now David. Too much sunshine is not good; it hurts, and may even blind you. And so it is in life, if we were to be always happy, and have everything we liked, we might forget God; so *He* sends us trouble as well as joy. This may make you understand a beautiful verse in the Bible—

“Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.”*

* PROVERBS iii. 12.

After David had been some while with Samuel, he thought he would go and see Jonathan, and hear if Saul felt any more kindly to him by this time; so he came to Jonathan, and asked him if he thought his life would be in danger were he to remain near Saul. Jonathan told him he would speak to his father again, and that he might depend on his saying all he could for him.

Once more Jonathan begged for his friend; but this time he could do no good; in fact, Saul got so angry that in his passion he took his javelin, and tried to kill his own son by throwing it at him. Fortunately, it did not strike Jonathan. He saw that nothing he could say would move the king; so, grieved and angry, he went forth from his father, and came to meet David.

As Jonathan drew near, David knew that there was no hope, and all the two friends could do, was to kiss each other, and then, after much weeping, to say good-bye. They feared that they might never

meet again alive. It was such a solemn parting; for they promised if they never did see each other again, but by-and-bye, when their children were grown up (for they now both of them had children of their own), if they could do a kindness to one another, they surely should.

This was how they said good-bye. Jonathan - going back to his father's house, whilst poor David set out to wander, he scarcely knew where, just to be safe out of Saul's way.

CHAPTER XIII.

DAVID'S WANDERINGS.

1 SAMUEL, xxi., xxiv.

Now, I have not time to tell you all the wonderful escapes that David had at this time of his life; how once he was starving, and might have died, if the good priests had not fed him with some of the holy bread from out of the Tabernacle. Another time he was obliged to ask for shelter with his old enemies the Philistines, when he had to pretend that he was mad, or they might have killed him, only you know nobody need be afraid of a poor idiot, and this was what the Philistines thought David now was, so they looked upon him as quite harmless.

Often David was obliged to hide in the woods or in caves (that is holes in the rocks), and once, when he was living in the wilderness, his faithful friend Jonathan came to see him. This was the happiest moment David had had for years. Jonathan told him he knew that he would be king of Israel, by-and-bye, and that Saul, his father, knew it too. "But, fear not, my father shall not find thee."

Do not you love Jonathan? You are not surprised that David did, as much as if he had been his brother. Most men would have felt jealous of David, as he was to have the kingdom, which Jonathan might have expected for himself after his father's death. But Jonathan loved David so purely and unselfishly that he really forgot to think of himself, and only felt pleasure in what would make David great. This is true love. And David, too, was a splendid character; through all his wanderings he never lost his faith in God. Some of his most beautiful Psalms, or hymns of praise as I told you you could call them, he

wrote when his life was in the greatest danger, and he had his reward. God was with him at all times, as He will be with you, dear children, if you deserve it. "I will love thee, O Lord! my strength."* "The Lord is near to those who call upon Him."†

These were the words that David sang, and he found them to be true. God was with him, and Saul could not harm him. There is one little story I must tell you, as it shows, more than any other, how generous and forgiving David was, as well as patient and truthful.

Now, first of all, you must know, dear children, that all this time whilst David was hiding, first in one place and then in another, he was not alone. As soon as his father and brothers got to hear where he was, they came to see him, and a great many of his old friends, too, followed, and they remained with him in all his wanderings, so as to give him help if he should want it against Saul; for the caves, as I told you, were not little places for just one

* PSALM xviii. 1. † PSALM cxlv. 18.

person to creep into, but sometimes they were like immense rooms, or rather cellars, with no light except near the hole by which the people got in. Now, I think you will understand the story you are going to hear.

Saul got very angry when he found that David always managed to escape him, so he called together more soldiers than he had before—three thousand men—and told them they must help him to catch David. So they started off and soon reached the very cave where David and his men were living. As I told you before, a cave is a dark place, and as it all happened to be quiet inside of David's cave when Saul passed by, he had no idea that there was any one there, and feeling tired, he thought he would go inside and rest. So the soldiers remained outside, and Saul went in and laid himself down to rest. All this time David and his men remained at the sides of the cave, so that Saul could not see them. Then David's men said to him, "Behold, God has sent your enemy into your hands that you may do what you like with him."

Do you think that David would like to take Saul's life as Saul had been trying to take his? Some of you boys will say, perhaps, that it would only be fair. But, no; David loved God too well to be revengeful. You shall see what he did. How *he* treated his enemy.

He went up quietly to Saul where he was lying, and cut off part of the skirt of his long robe. Even this he felt sorry for afterwards. He said to his men, "I wish that I had not put forth my hand at all against my master, seeing that he is the anointed of the Lord."

He would not let any of his soldiers hurt Saul. Presently the king arose and walked out of the cave. Then David too left it, and followed after Saul, and he cried out to him, "My lord the king."

Then Saul turned round and saw David, who bowed low to the ground before him, to show his respect for the Lord's anointed. Then he said to Saul, "Oh, why do you listen to those who tell you that I wish to do you harm? You can now see

how untrue it is. God gave you into my power to-day in the cave, and some of my men wanted me to kill you, but I could not do such a thing. See, here is a part of your robe that I cut off whilst you rested. I could as easily have taken your life. So now you will believe that there is not an unkind thought in my heart against you, so why do you want to take my life? I know that you have treated me very cruelly, but I will not avenge myself. Our God shall judge between us."

When Saul heard these words the old love and all the old feelings came back; once more he thought of the little shepherd lad, who had by his bravery saved him and all Israel from being servants to the hated Philistines. The bad envious spirit fled away, and the tears came into Saul's eyes as he called out, "Is this thy voice, my son David?"

He was obliged to cry, as he thought how he had indeed returned evil for good. So he confessed his fault and said to David, "You are better than I am, for you

have rewarded me good, whilst I have rewarded you evil. I have seen that this day, when God gave me into your hands, and you would not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, does he send him away in peace? May God give you a reward for your goodness. Now, I know well that the Lord intends you to be king, by-and-bye; only promise me one thing, that after I am dead, you will be kind to any of my family who may be alive, and you will not treat them as I have treated you."

Then David swore to Saul that he would always show kindness to any one belonging to him, and he never forgot his oath. Saul now went home, but David did not go with him, for he knew that Saul could not be trusted. Just now he felt sorry, but by-and-bye, when again the "evil spirit" of jealousy and envy might return, he would forget all his promises, and be ready to kill David if he had a chance.

Dear children, I want you to think a great deal about Saul and his "evil spirit."

Take warning from his history ; see how sad and sorry he often was ; and just remember that envy and jealousy were the cause of all his unhappiness. So try to be satisfied or content with whatever you have ; do not envy your richer or happier friends or companions ; do not think it hard if some of your playmates have much more money than you to spend on toys and goodies, or if some of them get a great many more treats than you do. Believe me, if you try to be satisfied with what you have, you will be quite as happy as they are, and God will love you for your contented heart.

The wisest man who ever lived says that
“ A contented mind is a continual feast.”

CHAPTER XIV.

DAVID, THE GENEROUS ENEMY.

1 SAMUEL, xxv., xxvi.

SOME months after Saul and David had parted at the cave, a **great** trouble fell on the people of Israel. Samuel, their faithful judge and prophet, died. The people remembered how good he had always been to them, so they were very grieved to lose him, and great numbers came to Ramah, where he had lived and died, to see him buried, as this was the only way now left them to show their respect. David, you know, could not come, as he would have been afraid to venture too near Saul.

Now I must tell you of a very unjust thing that Saul had done to David. You remember how David had to run away to

save his life, leaving his much-loved wife, Michal, behind him. Well, after he had gone, Saul made her take another husband. So now, when, I suppose, David hoped he was going to have a little peace and rest, he married some one else, a very wise woman named Abigail. She was not the only one, however, for David, as was the fashion in olden times, had several wives, but I am not going to trouble you with all their names; I dare say I shall tell you about one other by-and-bye.

Well, do you think that Saul kept his word this time, and left David alone in peace and quiet? I am very sorry to have to tell you he did not. Once more, and for the last time, he called out his soldiers and marched away to look for David and kill him. Again God tried or tempted David, as you shall hear.

Saul and his soldiers had been marching a long way, so, as they were tired, they laid themselves down for the night, and soon they were all fast asleep. Saul was lying with his spear stuck

in the ground close to his pillow, and a cup of water beside him. Now David, finding that Saul intended to kill him if he could catch him, sent out some spies to learn as much as possible. These men came back and told David where Saul was. Then David called one of his bravest followers and said to him, "We will go ourselves and see what they are doing at the camp."

To David's surprise, when he reached it, he found all the soldiers fast asleep. Even the guard, who should have been on the look-out, slept. The fact was that God had sent a deep sleep upon them. Presently David came upon Saul; then the young man who was with him said, "See, God has given him into our hands; let me take the spear which is by his side and with one stroke I can kill him."

But David said, "Destroy him not, for who can slay the Lord's anointed without sinning? As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall kill him: his day will come to die, or he will go forth to battle and not return. We will take the spear that is at his

pillow, and the water from his side, and let us go."

So they took the spear and the bowl of water and got away. No one either saw or heard them, for the whole army of soldiers was too fast asleep. Then David crossed over to a hill opposite, and called out to the captain of Saul's army, whose name was Abner, "Are you not a brave man? No one is thought like you in Israel. Then how is it that you have not taken better care of the king? One of the people crept in just now to take the king's life. If you doubt what I say, just look and see where the king's spear and cup of water are."

Then Saul knew that it was David's voice, and at the sound of it, his fondness for David came back, like it did after David had once before controlled himself when his enemy's life was in his hands. "Is this thy voice, my son David?" said Saul.

"It is my voice, my lord, O king. Why do you follow me up? What have I done, and how have I sinned against you?"

Then Saul said, "It is I who have

sinned; return my son, David, for I will not do you any more harm, because my life was precious in your eyes to-day. I have been very foolish, and have acted most wrongly."

Then David answered, "Let one of your young men come here and fetch the king's spear. The Lord rewards us all according to our deeds. He gave you into my hands to-day, but I would not take your life, as you are God's anointed. May God remember this, and guard my life and keep me from trouble."

Then they parted for the last time, David going one way and Saul the other. Do you see the difference between Saul and David? Saul trusted in his own strength and cleverness to save him, but David put all his faith in the Lord.

"Trust in the Lord, and do good."*

"It is God who giveth me strength."†

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."‡

* PSALM xxxvii. 3. † PSALM xviii. 32.

‡ PSALM xxiii. 1.

Yes, dear children, the Lord is your shepherd. You are His sheep; He will guard and keep you if you love Him.

“Oh, love the Lord! Be of good courage, and He will give you strength. Hope in the Lord.”*

“Trust in Him at all times, ye people, pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us.”†

So sang David, and so can we sing now, dear children, if we like to praise our loving Father, and we must do as David did, not only sing with our lips, but mean it with our hearts.

* PSALM xxxi. 23, 24. † PSALM lxii. 8.

CHAPTER XV.

SAUL'S DEATH.

1 SAMUEL xxviii., xxxi.

AND now we have come to the last chapter of Saul's life, so you will not expect a very happy one, for he had displeased God so very often, that at last he had to meet his punishment.

Once more I must tell you, that the Philistines got together a large army and came up to fight Saul. He gathered together too all his bravest soldiers, but when he saw the Philistine host, his courage failed him and his heart trembled. The good old prophet Samuel had been dead some time, so Saul could not go to him for advice and help. He did pray to God to

know if he would get the best of it in fighting the Philistines ; but God would not listen to him, for the prayers did not come from a penitent, sorrowful heart, but from a frightened, desperate one.

So Saul was sore disturbed in his mind, and you will not be surprised if I tell you, that going out to fight in this spirit, without help from God, on all sides the Israelites were beaten, they got disheartened and presently began to run away. Then the Philistines followed after Saul and his sons. Jonathan with all his brothers were slain, and Saul was so badly wounded, that he prayed his armour-bearer to take his sword and thrust it through him. But the man refused, he did not like to kill the anointed of the Lord, so Saul took his sword and threw himself on it and died.

I need not tell you this was wrong of Saul ; we must never take our own lives ; God gave us life, and it is He who will end it when He thinks it best ; if we are ill or unhappy so that we long for death, we must pray to our Father to give us strength

to bear life as long as He wishes it to last. However, Saul, brave though he was in most things, was a coward at the last. If we fear the Lord and trust in Him we need not be afraid of anything, but then you know that Saul did not put his hope in the Lord, so that was why he died so wretchedly. See what David says in one of his Psalms: "O Israel, trust thou in the Lord: He is our help and our shield."*

Presently, some Philistines came by and found the dead bodies of the king and his sons; they carried them away, stripped them of their armour, which they hung up in the temple of their chief god, and then, cruellest of all, they hung up the dead bodies themselves at the gates of one of their cities that all the Philistines might see what had become of the King of Israel, of whom they had all at one time been so frightened; for they sent the news round through all their cities and rejoiced over it in the temples of their false gods.

But now I must tell you of something that happened, which you will like to hear. The bodies of Saul and his sons were not allowed to remain hanging up at the Philistine gate, for some brave men, to whom Saul had long before been kind, rose up in the night in one of the Israelite cities, and went to the place where the bodies were, took them down — burned them — and buried them quietly under a tree.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EVIL TIDINGS.

2 SAMUEL i.

As you can fancy, it was not long before the news of Saul's death, and the Philistines beating the Israelites, was brought to David. At first he would not believe it, although he knew that a battle was going on between Saul and the Philistines, but when the messenger told him all, just as it had really happened, he could no longer hope that it was a false report.

Now, what do you think were David's feelings when he knew that at last he had no more to fear from Saul, who had so often tried to take his life?

If you or I, dear child, had been so badly treated by some one that our life had been

a misery to us, and we heard all at once that this enemy was dead, I am afraid our first thought would have been something of this sort, "Well, that is a good thing, he won't be able to hurt me any more!"

Do you believe David thought or said this? You cannot have paid much attention to what I have told you about David, if you say Yes. No. When David knew that Saul and Jonathan were dead, he cried and tore his clothes, and would not take anything to eat for hours. He forgot all Saul's unkindness, and only remembered the pleasant days when he was a little shepherd lad, and Saul, the noble-looking king, was good and generous to him until the "evil spirit" of jealousy came to spoil everything. David sang a beautiful song to the people about Saul and Jonathan; he reminded them how brave they had always been, leading the soldiers out to fight and conquer the enemies of Israel. He sang: "How are the mighty fallen! Saul and Jonathan were beautiful in their lives; they were swifter than eagles and stronger than

lions, and in their death they were not separated. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul. How are the mighty fallen in battle. I am desolate for thee, my brother Jonathan. Very pleasant hast thou been to me; thy love for me was wonderful, passing the love of women!"

You know that Jonathan was not really David's brother, but he meant that he could not have loved him better had he been.

Do you see how noble David was; not a word did he utter against Saul, he only spoke of all that had been pleasant and good about him. Take David for your example, dear children, and you must gain friends here on earth and have a true one in heaven.

CHAPTER XVII.

DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL.

2 SAMUEL v., vi.

YOU know that God had said that David was to be king after Saul's death. Now, the time had arrived for this promise to come true. The men of Israel knew this, so numbers of them came to David saying, "We are glad you are going to be our king, for we know that God has chosen you, and we love you, for have you not often led us out to fight our enemies, even whilst Saul was king?"

So David was anointed King of Israel; the priest poured the holy oil upon his head, like Samuel had done to Saul, and very happy David felt, for at last God's

promise, made so many years ago, was fulfilled, and beautiful psalms of praise he sang:—

“Oh, come, let us sing unto the Lord.”*

“Oh, sing unto the Lord a new song.”†

“Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.”‡

“I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplication.”§

Yes, David did truly love the Lord; whether he was sad or joyful, rich or poor, David loved the Lord. Nothing did he like better than to take his harp and sing psalms of praise to God. Is it not a good thing that these psalms have been written down and saved for us? You can praise God when you read them, if you like.

I want you to remember the name of the city where David lived after he became king—Jerusalem, the “holy city,” as we often call it in our prayers; you will soon see why. Jerusalem was a very beautiful

* PSALM xcv., 1. † PSALM xcvi., 1.

‡ PSALM cxii., 1. § PSALM cxvi., 1.

city, with several hills in it ; in fact it was these hills that helped to make its beauty, for you, perhaps, know that a very flat place can never be pretty to look at. Now one of these hills was called Zion, and it was on Zion that David chose to have a house built to live in. This house, or palace, as we now-a-days call a king's house, was made of cedar wood. Cedar trees are the choicest that can be used for building. David did not have to buy them ; they were sent him as a present from a king, named Hiram, who lived in a country close to Canaan, or "Palestine," as it was now often called. You never hear it spoken of now as Canaan, but always as "Palestine," or "the Holy Land." So Hiram made a present to David of all the wood he wanted to build his palace with. You see God was with David, and everything went well with him, so most of his neighbours liked to be good friends with him. If any of them would not, David always asked God's advice, whether he should go out and fight them, and God was gracious to him and

answered him, and if he was to go out God helped him, so David always had the best of it.

Do you know where the Ark was all this time? I hope you remember how Eli's two wicked sons took it with them when they went out to fight the Philistines, and the Philistines you know seized it. Although the Philistines had given it back to the Israelites, it had never been put in its place, within the Tabernacle at Shiloh, and now David had a great wish for the Ark to be brought up to his City of Zion, in Jerusalem. So David sent word all through the land to tell the people that he was going with some of the Levites to fetch the Ark, and if any of them liked, they might meet him on his return to Jerusalem to welcome it back.

Then David and the priests went and fetched it from a good man's house, where it had been taken care of. They were all dressed in fine white linen ephods, like I told you of in the chapter on the priests, and David took his harp and sang praises

to God all the way as they came along. The people too who were with him took their musical instruments, their cornets, and trumpets, and cymbals, and psalteries, and harps, and played on them, so that the rejoicing was great as "the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord" was brought up to Zion.

The old Tabernacle that Moses had set up was not used now, but David had prepared a new tent, or Tabernacle, near his own house or palace, and here it was that the Ark was placed.

David could not always be near the Ark singing psalms or hymns of praise, as God would not have been pleased with him if he had not attended to his people, so he said he would like some of the musicians to take it in turns to play in the Tabernacle, that there might always be the sound of sweet music coming from God's house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAVID'S HOLY DESIRE.

2 SAMUEL vii.

SOME years after David had been king, and his enemies had all left off fighting him, because they found that God always helped him, David said to his faithful adviser, the prophet Nathan, "See how I live in a beautiful house of cedar, whilst the Ark of God is only within curtains."

The wish in David's heart was to build a fine house for the Ark. Nathan the prophet was wise, as well as good, and he was pleased with David's thought, so he answered him, "Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee."

Now, that very same night as Nathan slept, he heard God speaking to him these

words, "Go, tell My servant David, thus saith the Lord, Shall a house be built for Me to dwell in? Ever since I brought the children of Israel out of Egypt I have not dwelt in any house, but have come to you in the tent, and in the Tabernacle. Have I ever said, Why do you not build Me a house of cedar? I have taken you, My servant David, from tending the sheep, to rule over My people Israel, and now they shall live in their own land and be at peace. However, you shall have a son, and he shall build Me a house, for My name, and I will be with him. I will be his father, and he shall be My son; if he does sin I shall punish him, but I will not take away the kingdom from him, as I did from Saul."

Here was a glorious, gracious promise to David, quite enough to console him for the disappointment of not being allowed to do the work himself for God! Do you know why God would not allow David to build the holy house? This is the reason: David had been obliged to fight so many battles during his life, that his hands were not fit

for such a work ; God would choose a man of peace, not a man of war, for such a purpose. So Nathan came to David and told him all the words of the Lord. David was so grateful for God's promise, that he should have a son, who might do the great work, that his first act, when Nathan left him, was to pray to God and thank Him in these words : " Thou art great, O Lord God, for there is none like Thee. And what one nation in the earth is like Thy people Israel, for Thou hast taken Thy people Israel, to be a people unto Thee for ever, and Thou, Lord, art become their God."

Now, my dear children, I want you always to remember this, that you are of God's own people ; you must feel proud of it as David did, and let your behaviour be such, that others may notice you are really proud of it in the right way. It makes me sad when I think there are people, who, instead of being delighted that they have been born Jews, are half ashamed of it, or perhaps like to hide the truth.

You must try to be brave, and good, and

keep from sin, so that your friends who are not Jews, may admire you as Jewish children. I hope you understand me. We are God's own people, whom He chose for Himself from all the other nations of the world, and He would have destroyed us long ago for our disobedience and ingratitude to Him, if His love had not been that of a Father for His children, and such love you know can never die, so deserve a share of it yourselves, my dear children.

CHAPTER XIX.

BATHSHEBA, OR THE EWE LAMB.

2 SAMUEL xi., xii.

I AM so sorry that now I have to tell you of something very wrong that David did. Still, it would scarcely seem like a true story if you did not hear of any but his good deeds ; for as, perhaps, you do not yet know, the best men and women sin sometimes. “For there is no man so perfect as to do good, and sin not.”* But God is always ready to forgive, if repentance follows sin. Well, one evening David was walking on the roof of his house. You remember, I hope, how I told you in the history of Rahab, that in hot countries in the

* ECCLESIASTES vii., 20.

East, the roofs of houses were not sloping like ours, but flat. People could then sit or walk there in the cool of the evening.

David was walking on his roof, when, looking down, he saw a very beautiful woman bathing. He thought at once that he would like her for his wife; so he sent one of his servants to find out who she was. The man came back with the answer that her name was Bathsheba, and that she was the wife of a soldier, named Uriah. This news ought to have been quite enough to make David think no more about her, for fear of breaking the seventh commandment.

But David was determined to have her for his wife. So see what a dreadful thing he did. David wrote a letter to Joab, the captain of his army, that he was to put Uriah in the front part of the battle, so that he might get killed. Now, if Joab had been a good man, he would not have attended to such a wicked order; but he was a bad, cruel man, and at the first opportunity, Uriah was told to go forward

to a dangerous post, and there he quickly lost his life. Joab soon sent the news of Uriah's death to David, and the king was pleased to receive it, for now there was nothing to prevent Bathsheba being his wife; and after she had mourned a little while for her husband, David sent and fetched her, and she became his wife.

Here is another instance for you of one sin leading on to another. If David had checked his first covetous feeling when he looked on the beautiful woman, he would never have fallen into the greater sin of killing Uriah. Besides this, all the misery he suffered, when he had afterwards to own it, and accept his punishment from God, would have been saved.

Dear children, let this be a lesson to you. Do try not even to sin in little things; as when you once begin to be wicked, you do not know where you may stop; and, believe me, wickedness always means misery, and you know best whether you would like to feel miserable or happy.

“But the thing that David had done dis-

pleased the Lord,"* and David soon knew this; for the prophet Nathan came and said he had something to tell him. Here are Nathan's words: "There were two men in one city; one was rich, and the other was poor. The rich man had numbers of sheep and oxen; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had brought up and taken great care of. It grew up with his children; he fed it with meat, and let it drink out of his own cup; he used to take it on his lap and nurse it, it was just like a pet child to him. One day a traveller came to see the rich man, and he would not kill one of his own sheep to cook and set before his visitor, but went and took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the stranger to eat."

David was very angry when he heard of such a cruel deed, and he said to Nathan, "The man who has done this, shall give back four lambs to the poor man, and he shall surely die, because he did this thing and had no pity."

* 2 SAMUEL xi., 27.

Then Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man! God saved you from the hand of Saul, and made you king of Israel, and now, how could you break the commandment of God, and do evil in His sight? God will punish you, your children will disobey you, and give you trouble by quarrelling among themselves. Besides this, the little child that is just born to Bathsheba shall die."

Then David said, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Nathan then went away, leaving David very sorrowful and penitent, and David took his harp, and sang to it one of the most beautiful of his psalms.* He prayed God to forgive him, and let him sin no more. He said, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness. Wash me thoroughly from my sin, and I shall be whiter than snow. Oh, hide Thy face from my sins. Create in me a pure heart, O God; and put a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence."

* PSALM li.

Where can you find more lovely words to pray with to God, if you sin? See how humble and sorry David was. This is what makes David's history so beautiful to read. The Bible tells us of all his faults, and how he repented of them, as well as his great and good deeds. It shows us how when he sinned, which he did often (like you or I do), he was truly sorry, and therefore earned forgiveness. However wicked anyone may be, remember that God is always ready to forgive him if he repents truly. This ought to teach you not to be hard yourselves with those who do wrong; if you do, *you* are sinning in the sight of God. You must instead try to lead the bad back to goodness, then God will love you yet the more; for Heaven is a wide place, and it cannot be too full to please the Lord of it.

Now, although God forgave David, still He did not alter what He had said about punishing him. Just like when you are naughty, your parents will kiss you if they see you are really sorry, still they think it

right to punish you as they said all the same, so that you may not forget, and do wrong again too quickly.

So the little child of David and Bathsheba got very ill. David was so grieved he would scarcely take anything to eat, but spent all his time praying to God to make it well. This went on for a week, and then God took the little baby to join the angels in heaven. David's servants were afraid to come and tell him. They said, "See how our dear master has been grieving ever since the child was sick. What will he do when he hears it is dead?"

David noticed the people about him whispering together, and he guessed the reason of it, so he said, "Is the child dead?" and they answered, "He is dead."

Then David got up from the ground, where he had been lying in his grief, put on clean clothes, and went into the house of God to pray. Then he came back, and ate and drank as usual. His servants looked on, wondering. At last they asked him, "How is this? Whilst the child was

alive, you fasted and wept; but now that it is dead, you get up and eat."

Then David said, "Whilst the child was still alive, I prayed to God, thinking He might listen to me and save it; but now it is dead, what good can I do by fasting? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

I suppose you know what David meant by this? He was thinking of when he too must die, and he hoped God would take him to heaven to be an angel there, and sing more psalms of praise, and then he would find his little baby.

If you are ever ill, and likely to die, dear children, do not feel afraid. Think like David did, when his little child died. He knew that God was waiting for it in heaven, and so is God always ready for you, and surely it must be better to be an angel in heaven, than only a child on earth.

CHAPTER XX.

ABSALOM, THE REBELLIOUS SON.

2 SAMUEL xv., xvi., xvii.

I TOLD you before that David had several wives ; he had, too, many sons, and you will be sorry to hear that some of them were bad and undutiful. There is one in particular that you must learn about. His name was Absalom. He was very tall and beautiful to look upon. His hair was something wonderful, longer than any other man's in Israel. Strange to say, this Absalom, although he was always doing something to grieve David, was still his favourite son. Nothing was too wicked for him to do ; he was displeased with one of

his brothers, so he killed him. When David heard of this, he was obliged to punish him, and he said he would not allow him to live in Jerusalem any longer. David ought to have kept to this, for it was really not a severe enough punishment for such a terrible sin ; but after some time, he longed so to see Absalom, that he sent him word he might return. Absalom was very glad to get permission to come back, and when he came to David, bowing to the ground, David forgave him and kissed him.

It would have been well for David, if he had been stricter with Absalom, and had not forgiven him so soon, for Absalom was wicked and deceitful. He had not been long back in Jerusalem before he tried secretly to set the people against the king. Was not this horrible behaviour ? He pretended that if he were king, the people would have everything they liked. Then, sometimes, when the people bowed before him, because he was the king's son, he would make them leave off and go and kiss them, to try and make them believe he did

not consider himself any better than they were, so of course they imagined he was not at all proud, and all the while he was only acting like this, to get their love away from David and gain it for himself.

When this had gone on for some years, Absalom made up his mind to try if the people would have him for king instead of his father. This is how he set to work. First of all, he asked David's permission to go away for a little while, to pay some vow he had promised. David, who did not suspect anything, said, "Go in peace."

So Absalom went. Then he sent messengers all through the land, saying, "When you hear the sound of the trumpet, then shout, Absalom is king!"

Soon the news came to David, that Absalom was getting himself made king. David was so shocked when he heard it, that all his old courage left him. He remembered the words of the prophet Nathan, and he was afraid even to remain in his own house in Mount Zion. He called all his old faithful servants together and said,

“Let us flee from Jerusalem, or else we shall not escape from Absalom. We must make haste to depart.”

His servants answered, that whatever he wished, they were ready to do. So poor old David went forth and numbers of the people followed him. Presently they came to a little brook. Now, all the people were crying, for they thought how hard it was for David to have such a wicked rebellious son. The priests had brought the Ark of God with them from the City of Zion, as they were determined to go with the King wherever he went, but when David found this was the case, he turned round and spoke to the High Priest and told him to carry it back to the City. He said, “If God is not angry with me, He will bring me back again to Zion and I shall see it. But if it is His will that I do not return, I shall be satisfied.”

So the priests obeyed David's wishes, and the holy Ark was taken back to Jerusalem, whilst David went on his way until he came to a mountain called “Olivet.” He

wept as he toiled up it,* and all the people who followed wept too. Must it not have been a sad sight?

Just think what a wicked man Absalom was, to cause his father all this trouble and grief! As David went on a little farther up the mount, a bad man came after him and threw stones at him and his servants, and said such wicked things. One of David's officers wanted to kill the man, but David said, "No, leave him alone. God is punishing me."

And, you know, David was right; Nathan's words were coming true, I mean the prophecy he told to David after Uriah had been killed.

So Absalom and his friends came to Jerusalem, and settled themselves down comfortably in David's beautiful house on Mount Zion, whilst the poor old king and his faithful followers had to shift as best they could in the wilderness. Here they rested a little while, but they were afraid

to remain long for fear of Absalom coming after them, so they journeyed on again, and presently came to the river Jordan, the same that I told you about when Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan. They crossed the river, and here God raised them some kind friends, for three rich, good men, hearing in what haste David had left his own palace, and knowing he could not have had time to take anything with him to be comfortable, came to him now, bringing beds, loaves of bread, raisins, wheat, barley, and parched corn, honey, butter, cheese, and sheep for David, and the people who were with him, to eat: for they said, "The people must be hungry and tired and thirsty in the wilderness."

After this David felt much happier and comfortable, and God was pleased with these good kind men, as He always is with any kind act of yours to those who are in trouble. So you see, dear child, *two* people are the better for a good deed, the one who does it, and the one to whom it is done; so if you want to be remembered in the "book

of God's remembrance,"* be extra kind and loving to those who are unhappy, as they want it more than the happy ones do. So it was not only the useful presents that did David good, it was almost more, the kind feelings now that he did not feel sure who were, or who were not, his friends.

* MALACHI iii., 16.

CHAPTER XXI.

ABSALOM, OR THE PUNISHMENT.

2 SAMUEL xviii.

ABSALOM was not satisfied with frightening his father away from Jerusalem; but he got all the soldiers he could, and determined to fight; so he followed after David.

David got ready to go out and meet him; but David's followers loved him too well to allow this. They said, "You shall not go out to battle. If half of us were to be killed, what would it matter? You are worth ten thousand of us, so remain where you are safe, and direct us what to do."

So the king said, "I will do whatever seems best to you."

Then the king stayed in the city and all

his people set out to meet Absalom's army. Poor David! His heart ached as he thought of his wicked son. He still hoped that he might repent, and then he would forgive him. He begged Joab, the captain of his army, not to kill him, if he should fall into his hands. "Deal gently with the young man for my sake." *

I daresay you, dear children, can scarcely understand such pity on David's part; but you know I always tell you that when you are naughty, and your parents have to punish you, it hurts them often more than it does you. So it was with David now. He prayed earnestly that God would soften Absalom's heart, that he might say he was sorry for all the mischief he had caused, as even then David would have pardoned him. But Absalom was too wicked. On he came, leading one large party of Israelites, to fight against a number of the same nation. This would be the cruellest of battles; for friends would be opposite to friends, and perhaps fathers

and sons might find themselves obliged to fight against each other, as the father living in one city might have gone to help David, whilst his son in some other part of Palestine might have joined Absalom. This is called a civil war; and a very fierce one it was. David and Absalom's soldiers fought long and bravely.

Absalom himself was riding along on a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of an oak tree, when Absalom's head got caught in the branches, and the mule went away, leaving him hanging to the tree, by that very hair of which he had been so vain.

One of David's soldiers going by, saw him in this position, but would not touch him, because he had heard David's words about sparing him. So the man went on until he came to Joab, whom he told where he had just seen Absalom. Joab was very angry and said, "Why did you not kill him? I would have given you a lot of money, and a fine girdle."

Then the man made answer, "However

much money you had given me, I would not have laid hands on the king's son; for did I not hear David charge you, that no harm was to be done to Absalom?"

Then Joab said, "I will not leave him there."

And he took three arrows in his hand, and went to the tree where Absalom was still hanging, but not dead. He shot them at him, and told some young men who had gone with him, to strike him too, and make sure that he was dead. So Absalom died. It was a horrible death, but he was not too severely punished, when you recollect how wickedly he had behaved.

Then Joab blew the trumpet, to call the people back from running after Absalom's soldiers, as there was no need to fight any more, now that Absalom was dead.

CHAPTER XXII.

PEACE FOR DAVID.

2 SAMUEL xviii., xix.

ALL the while that the battle had been going on between David and Absalom's men, David had been waiting most impatiently for news. Of course he wished his own soldiers to win, but for all that, he hoped that Absalom would be safe. David thought perhaps he might be taken prisoner, or manage to run away if his side should get the worst of it, but he was miserable at the idea of his getting killed.

So David sat at the gates of the city that he had fled to in the wilderness, and the watchman went up to the roof over the

gate to look out and tell David as soon as he should see any one coming. Presently a man was in sight running alone, so the watchman called out and told the king.

Then David said: "If he is alone he must be bringing news."

Then the watchman saw another man also running, and he sent word of this to David. David said, "He must also be bringing me a message. Can you make out who he is?"

Then the watchman said, "I think the first man running looks like the priest's son."

And David said, "He is a good man, so I think that he brings me good news."

The watchman was right, the first man was a young priest. He came up to the gate and threw himself down before David, with his face to the ground, and he said, "All is well. Blessed be the Lord God, which hath given up the men who lifted their hands against my lord the king."

You see this good young man did not like to grieve David by telling him of his

son's death ; he only wanted him to know that his soldiers had conquered Absalom's.

And now the other messenger reached the gate and called out, "Tidings, my lord, the king ! The Lord has punished this day all those who rose up against you."

Then came the anxious question, "Is the young man, Absalom, safe?"

And the messenger answered, "May all the enemies of my lord the king be as that young man is."

By these words David knew that Absalom was dead. He was "much moved," and went up to his chamber over the gate to weep alone. How he wished he might have died instead of Absalom, as he cried with a bitter cry, "Oh ! my son, Absalom, my son, my son, would to God I had died for thee !"

Can you tell me, dear children, why David's sorrow was so great now ? You know he left off mourning as soon as Bathsheba's little baby died. So why did he grieve so sadly now ? It was because Absalom had died in his wickedness. David could not

hope to meet him in heaven. God is indeed "slow to anger," but, remember, He is also a just God, and "punishes those who break His commandments."* Do not provoke God to anger, dear children, by being rebellious to your parents, like Absalom was; for it would be a grievous thought both for you and them if you were ill and dying, that you could not reach heaven.

So David remained in his room mourning for Absalom, and the people were disappointed, as they returned victorious from the battle, that their beloved king, for whom they had been fighting, did not come out to meet them.

Then Joab went to David and told him, "You must not grieve any more for Absalom. It is not fair to the people, who have been fighting so bravely for you. Why, if Absalom were still alive, we might all have died to-day without your caring."

Joab's words were rough and unkind, for as I told you before, he was not a good man, although he was a brave one, or else

* CREED xi.

David would never have made him captain over all his army.

David now saw that Joab was right; so he came down to the gate to meet his people. They were indeed pleased to see him, and said he must return to Jerusalem. How fond and proud these Israelites were of David! He had such loving ways, that "he turned the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man,"* and now they were going to bring him back in triumph to Jerusalem.

What a different journey to the last! Do you remember I told you that a wicked man cursed the king before he crossed the Jordan? Well, now, this man came out to beg David to forgive him. What do you think David did? Would he forgive him, or would he punish him?

Some of the king's friends wanted him to have the man put to death; but David would not listen to them. He thought quite enough people had died already. "Thou shalt not die," he said.

* 2 SAMUEL xix., 14.

He left the punishment to God and the man's own conscience, and I do not fancy he could have felt very happy.

So once more David was back in Jerusalem, king in his own beautiful house on Mount Zion.



CHAPTER XXIII.

DAVID'S PRIDE.

2 SAMUEL xxiv.

I AM going to tell you another story of David, about something wrong that he did. I know it will interest you, because it is so beautiful to notice how sorry he was afterwards.

For years after Absalom's death, David lived in peace and at rest from his enemies, and then, I am grieved to say, he grew proud, and liked to boast of the number of people who called him king. God was vexed with him for this, and He was very angry when He heard David tell Joab, "Go through all the land, and number the people, that I may know how many there are."

Joab, as you have already seen, never

minded what he said to David, and now he begged him to take back his order, and not do this thing, as it was contrary to God's wishes. He said, "Why will my lord order this? Why bring such trouble on the land?"

But David was obstinate, and would not listen to Joab's advice; so captains were sent all through the land to take the number of the people. You can imagine what a great nation the Israelites had become, when I tell you that the officers were more than nine months at the work.

God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was indeed coming true. Do you remember the words to Abraham, "I will give to thee, and thy children after thee, this land where thou art a stranger, the land of Canaan.* I will make thy seed numerous as the stars of heaven, and as the sand on the sea-shore. In thy descendants shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."†

And so they have been blessed, you

* GENESIS xvii., 8. † GENESIS xxii., 17, 18

know, through our beautiful "Torah," or law, which was given to the whole world through us on Mount Sinai; although, because of our sins, we have not now the land of Canaan for our own, some day God, our God of love, will forgive us, and take us back there again.

But David forgot all this, when in the pride of his heart he gave orders to Joab to count the people. No sooner, however, had it been done, than David's conscience began to make him feel uncomfortable. You know how unhappy that little voice within *you* makes *you* feel sometimes, and so it did David.

"I have been very wicked; forgive me, O Lord, for what I have done, for, indeed, I have acted foolishly."

The next morning a prophet named Gad came to David, bringing a message from God; he said, "God must punish you for your disobedience, but as you have confessed how wrong you have been, and are sorry for it, He will let you choose one of three things for your punishment.

“ Shall seven years of famine come upon the country ? Shall your enemies follow after you for three months, whilst you have to fly from them all the time ? Or shall there be three days’ sickness in the land ? Think well over it, that I may know what answer to make to Him who sent me to you ? ”

Which punishment do you think David chose ? They were all terrible to have to bear ; but I think you will agree with me that David made up his mind for the best. He said to the prophet Gad, “ I am sadly puzzled, but I would rather fall by the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great. Do not let me fall into the hand of man.”

So God sent a plague upon the people of Israel, all through the land, and great numbers of them got ill and died, just as they did in the wilderness when God sent a plague on the people who murmured against Moses.

Think how awfully sad David must have been, as he looked round on all the misery, and knew that this sickness and death was

caused by his foolish pride. When the third day came, and God's sword was still among the people, David could bear it no longer. He fell on his face, and prayed to God.

"It is I that have sinned and done evil ; but these sheep that Thou gavest into my hands to take care of, what have they done ? I pray Thee, O Lord, my God, let Thy hand be on me and my children, but not on Thy people ; let them not be plagued any more." You know what David meant, I dare say, by his *sheep* ? Just as in one of his most beautiful Psalms, he said that God was his shepherd,* so he spoke of himself as the shepherd of his people ; for they were his sheep whom God had given him to tend and guard.

God now heard David's cry, "for the Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to those who call upon Him in truth," and the angel of death stopped his cruel work, and the plague was over. No more people

* PSALM xxiii., 1.

were ill, or died. David's first wish in his thankfulness for this, was to build an altar to God on the very spot where the plague ended. The plague ended at a place where wheat was being threshed. The man to whom this part belonged, wished to give David the ground for the altar, with some cattle as well for the sacrifices; but David would not accept them. He said, "Nay, but I will pay you the full price for it. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord of that which cost me nothing."

So David bought the threshing-floor and the cattle. Then he built the altar, and laid on it peace-offerings, because the plague was over.

Now, my dear children, I should not have told you this sad story without a special reason. I want you to take this lesson from it. Think well before you act, as when you do wrong, remember it is not only you yourself who suffer from it, but others perhaps; those you love very much always feel it too. Believe me, that when you are naughty, the pain you cause your parents

or teachers is in itself an offence in the sight of God. I am sure you do not wish to grieve your Father in heaven ; so I hope that this story may make you more careful in your behaviour, then I shall know that I did right in telling it you.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAVID'S DEATH.

1 KINGS i., ii.

Now you know that David had several sons; one of these was to be king after David's death. Which of them do you think was chosen? The eldest? No. It was one who was called Solomon; his very name was beautiful, for it meant "peace."* Bathsheba was his mother. God had told David this son was to be king. You may be sure that he was the best of David's sons, or he would not have been selected, as he was, to be allowed to build the holy Temple at Jerusalem. Another brother, however, tried to get made king;

* 1 CHRONICLES xxii., 9.

so David, who was very old, and knew he would soon die, called the prophet Nathan and some of his most faithful servants to him. He told them to take Solomon and have him anointed king in the sight of all the people, so that there should be no disputing about who should sit on his throne when he died. So the priest took a horn of holy oil and poured some of it on Solomon's head; then the trumpet was blown and all the people shouted, "God save king Solomon."

Soon after this David felt that he was dying, so he called his son Solomon to him, to bless him, and he begged him to keep the Commandments of the Lord, and to do all that was written in the Law of Moses, for then God would be with him, and everything would go well and happily.

Almost the last words he said to Solomon were, "Never forget those who showed kindness to me when I was in sore trouble and had to run away from Jerusalem because of Absalom."

David gave Solomon something besides all this good advice; he had prepared patterns from which to make the different parts of the Temple. David gave Solomon gold and silver as well as patterns, and all the people came forward and brought whatever they had which might be useful in building the holy house, just the same as the Israelites in the wilderness had done for the work of the Tabernacle.

David rejoiced when he saw how ready the people were to help his young son, and he broke out into a sweet Psalm of praise. He said that all these beautiful things which were brought together for the holy work came from God; just see how humble he was,

“Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer anything to Thee? All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. It is Thy hand that makes great and gives strength to all.”*

* 1 CHRONICLES xxix., 12.

David finished by praying God to give Solomon a perfect heart, that he might be a good man and keep the commandments. Then David died at a good old age and was buried in the City of David, that is in Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, and Solomon sat on his father's throne and was king over all Israel.

My dear children, I have now told you all the history of David; you know what wicked things he did, as well as the good ones. Now what do you think became of him when he died? Did God find a place for him in Heaven, was he fit to be one of God's saints there? Yes, yes, my darlings, for with all that he did wrong sometimes, he did love God, and repented truly of his sins, so you may feel sure that when he died, God took him to heaven, where he is even now, singing beautiful hymns of praise, as he delighted to in his life-time.

One of our greatest prophets tells us, that even if we sin again and again, but are truly sorry for it afterwards, God will forgive us and take us back to His love, for

it pains Him to be obliged to punish us.* So I want you never to be afraid of asking God yourself to forgive you. He will never turn away His ear, if you pray to Him from your heart. This lesson you can learn from the beautiful history of David.

* EZEKIEL xxxiii., 11.

CHAPTER XXV.

SOLOMON'S CHOICE.

1 KINGS iii.

THE very first thing that Solomon did after he was king, was to offer up sacrifices to God. It was not in Jerusalem that he did this, but at the place where the Tabernacle, made by Moses, was. You remember, I hope, the altar of brass that I told you about. You can picture to yourself a little its immense size, when I tell you that Solomon laid a thousand animals on it for burnt offerings.

That very night, when Solomon was asleep, God came to him in a dream, or "vision" as it is properly called, and said: "Ask what shall I give thee."

What do you think was Solomon's an-

swer? There were so many things he might wish for. You see he was so very young to be king over such a large nation as Israel; for in those days the king was the judge, too, of his people. Like Moses and Samuel, and other great men you have heard of, he had to decide any dispute that was brought to him, and it was sometimes very difficult to find out who was right, and who was wrong. Solomon was very anxious to be a good king, so see what a sensible answer he made to God. He said,

“Give me only wisdom and knowledge, that I may be able to judge this Thy people who are so great.”

God was very pleased with Solomon's choice, and He said to him, “Because you have not asked for riches, nor honour, nor long life, nor to be greater than the kings of the other nations who are near you, you shall have what you desire. You shall be wiser than any man who has ever lived, and besides this, you shall have such riches, wealth, and honour, as no other king has ever had before, and there will never

be one after you to have the same. And if you will walk in My ways, and keep My commandments, and love Me as your father David did, then I will also grant you a long life."

Then Solomon woke up, and the next day he came to Jerusalem, and again offered up sacrifices, this time before the Ark of the Covenant; for David, I told you, brought the Ark up to Zion, but not the Tabernacle.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOLOMON'S JUDGMENT.

1 KINGS iii.

A VERY little while after Solomon's wonderful dream, he had a good opportunity of showing that God had indeed made him wiser than other people.

Two women came to him to settle a very strange quarrel. One of them said, "We lived together alone in a house, and we had each a little baby boy. One night the other woman laid over her baby, whilst she was sleeping, and it died. She got up in the night, and without my knowing it, took my little son from me whilst I slept, and laid her dead baby in its place beside me. When I woke up in the morning, and

wanted to nurse my child, I found instead of my own dear little baby, this woman's dead one."

Then the second woman came forward to the king, and cried out, "Nay, but the living child is *mine*, and the dead one is *yours*."

Then the woman who had spoken first, answered, "No; the dead is your son, and the living one mine."

And so they disputed before the king. How could he find out which woman was telling the truth?

See what a clever thought God put into his head. He said, "Bring me a sword."

Then they brought Solomon a sword, and he called out, "Cut the child in two, and give half to one woman and half to the other."

Perhaps you can guess what happened next? When the real mother—that was the woman who first spoke to the king—saw that her baby was going to die, she felt she would rather lose it than have it hurt; so she called out quickly, "Oh, my

lord! Give her the living child. Do not slay it!"

But the other woman said, "Let it neither be mine nor yours, but divide it."

Then the king answered, "Give the first woman the living child. On no account kill it, for she is its mother."

Do you think Solomon was right in his judgment? Do you believe that he ever meant really to divide the child between the two women?

No. Of course he did not; but he knew that the real mother would rather give up her baby altogether to the bad woman who said it was hers, than see it in pain. You know that mothers love their children, and would rather be hurt themselves than let any harm come to their darlings, so Solomon's wise plan soon brought out the truth. You see, the bad woman who did not speak the truth, she was jealous of the other having her baby still alive, and did not mind what became of it, as her own was dead.

All the people in the land heard of

"Solomon's wise judgment," and they feared and obeyed the king, who, you must remember, was a mere lad at the time; for they saw that God was helping him to judge them.

Dear children, if God were to say to you, "You can have anything you like," I wonder would you be sensible, and choose as Solomon did?

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

1 KINGS vi., vii., viii.

SOLOMON now set about his great work—four hundred and eighty years after the Israelites had come out from Egypt—I mean the building of the Temple. Although David had prepared and saved all sorts of treasures for Solomon to use, so that he had many things ready to begin with, still it took him seven years to have it built.

It was an immense place, this house of the Lord. God himself gave Solomon orders how large the different parts were to be. First there was the Temple itself, the upper end of this was called the Oracle, or Holy of Holies. Here the Ark was to be placed. Outside the Temple were the courts where the offerings were laid on the different altars, and here was set up the

famous bath for the priests, or "molten sea," as it was called.

Solomon was careful that the Temple should be built very strong, as well as beautiful to look at; he hoped it would last a very long time, so he had large stones hewn and laid down for the foundation; then this was covered over with wood—wood the most beautiful that could be got—cedar wood from Mount Lebanon. The king to whom Lebanon belonged was a great friend of Solomon, and let him have as many trees as he liked to send his servants to cut down; his name was Hiram. So Solomon made all the temple of cedar wood, and over it he put a layer of gold. Think how magnificent it must have looked when you entered the Temple: everywhere the shining bright gold, for everything that was used inside was of the same metal, the candlesticks and the tables, and all that the priests used in sacrificing.

The walls even were not painted, but were covered with gold too, and had angels and flowers carved on them. Precious

stones were used everywhere to ornament the holy house.

The Holy of Holies, the inner room that I told you was for the Ark, was built in just the same manner, only there were two cherubim, or angels, of olive wood, covered with gold, who stretched their wings right across the place where the Ark would rest, as if to show that they, the likenesses of God's messengers, were there to guard it.

The "molten sea" that I spoke of to you just now, was a bath like an enormous basin. The priests used it to wash in. It was made of brass, and did not stand flat on the ground, but on what do you think? Twelve enormous oxen made in copper, much larger than real ones, were set round in a sort of ring, and then the bath or "sea" was fixed on them. I think there must have been steps for the priests to go up and down by, for it stood much higher than a man, or, in fact, than several men put together.

The only other things I shall tell you of, are a large brass altar Solomon made and

set up to sacrifice numbers of animals on, ten golden candlesticks, ten golden tables, and ten large brass basins, not for the priests this time, but for the animals to be washed in before they were sacrificed; you see everything must be perfectly clean that is used in the service of God.

At last the work was over; everything was perfect. Of course, dear children, you do not think, because I say that Solomon built the Temple, that he actually made it with his own hands. His whole lifetime would not have been long enough for that, but he had thousands of servants and workmen; some of them were very clever with their hands, and they were all only too pleased to be of use in such a holy work. They all felt so happy when Solomon called some of the oldest men, and said:

“The Temple is finished! Come, let us go and fetch the Ark from Mount Zion where David kept it, and we will bring it here.” So some of the priests and the elders went with Solomon to fetch the Ark, and they carried it up to the Temple. All the people

followed, and great was their joy when they saw the "Holy of Holies" open, and the Ark of the Covenant placed there under the two golden angels. There was nothing in the Ark but the two tables of stone with the Ten Commandments.

So God's house was ready, and He was pleased with the work, and a cloud filled the holy place. God had come into the Temple; His glory filled it. He would show Himself to the people. Solomon had been standing on a high place* that had been put up for him, so that he should be in the sight of all the people, but now that God had made Himself seen, a humble spirit came over Solomon, and he fell on his knees and began praying to God.

First of all he thanked Him for having kept the promise He made to David; then he asked God never to cast off His people, but always to hearken to their prayers. "Hear Thou from Thy dwelling-place, even from heaven," he said; "and when Thou hearest, forgive."

* 2 CHRONICLES vi., 13.

He prayed for a long time, and when he had finished, God answered him, *how* do you think? Not by words, but in this way. A number of animals had been laid on the altars to be sacrificed, but the priests had no need to set fire to the wood that was under them. God sent fire from heaven, and it burnt them.

When the people saw this sign from God, they all bowed their faces to the ground, and sang a psalm of thanks—one of David's Psalms—to praise God. They said: "The Lord is good; His mercy it lasteth for ever."*

Then Solomon and the people offered more sacrifices, and the priests burned the sweet incense, and the sound of music and psalms was heard all over the Temple. How beautiful it must have been! When Solomon had opened the Temple to the people, it was the season to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, and happily indeed did they keep it that year, not seven, but twice seven—for fourteen days, and after that Solomon sent them back to their homes

* PSALM CXXXVI.

glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the Lord had shown them.

Do you know in what part of the city the Temple was built? On Mount Moriah, on the very place where Abraham had built the altar and got ready to offer up his son Isaac.

Is it not sad, dear children, that there is no beautiful temple now for you and me to go and say our prayers in? Do you know why this is? I told you a long time ago. It is because we have been wicked, so we must be satisfied with our synagogue; and never forget when you are there that you are in God's house, and you must be more particular how you behave there than anywhere else. God is angry with you if you talk and look about in "His place." Try to be good, my darlings, and perhaps some day we may have a lovely temple of our own again, when God lets us live once more in Palestine; for, remember, we Jews are still His own beloved people. He has never shaken us off, although He has thought it right to punish us.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SOLOMON AND THE COVENANT.

1 KINGS ix.

AFTER Solomon had finished the Temple and prayed there as I have just told you about, God came and spoke to him for the second time at night, just as He had when Solomon was first king. The Lord said, "I have heard the prayer that you have prayed to Me. I have made holy this house, which you have built for My name, and I will dwell there for ever. If you will love Me, like your father David did, and keep My laws which I have given you, then you and your children, and their children after them, shall be kings of Israel for ever. But if you or your children do turn from following Me, and disobey My commandments, and

serve other gods, then I will take this land of Israel (or Canaan) away from you, and this holy house, which is called by My name, will I destroy, and every one shall say, 'See what has happened to the people of Israel, because they forsook the Lord, who brought them out of Egypt. They have prayed to idols, therefore has the Lord brought this trouble on them.'"

CHAPTER XXIX.

SOLOMON'S HOUSE AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

1 KINGS vii., x.

THERE was something else that Solomon built besides the Temple, this was a beautiful palace for himself to live in. He was nearly twice as long over it as he had been at the work of the Temple. Now, what do you think was the reason? Was Solomon's house larger or grander than God's? No, my dear children, but Solomon was so anxious to get the Temple finished, that he set as many of his servants as he could to work at it, and hurried them on, whilst he thought that it did not matter if he had to wait a few years more for his own house.

It was made of rich cedar wood, but not covered over with gold like the Temple.

It was ornamented with rows of precious stones. Just think how rich God had made Solomon, when he could use jewels in such a manner. Jewels that you see people wearing, such as diamonds, rubies, emeralds, topazes, &c., Solomon had in such quantities, that he had them fixed in three rows between the cedar wood, round the great court outside of his palace, besides what were used to ornament the inside of the house. How they must have shone and glittered!

Then Solomon had an immense throne of white ivory and gold; there were six steps in front to go up by, and on each step was a carved lion. The lion you know is the strongest and noblest of all the animals, so I think Solomon chose them for a sign to the people of how strong and mighty God had made him; and the ivory is so white and pure, perhaps Solomon wished that to be taken as a sign, that his judgments should always be fair and pure, for he used to sit on this throne to judge the people and to settle any dispute they might have had.

Not only Solomon's house was so magnificent, but everything in it was richer than in any other king's palace. All his cups and plates, his dishes and spoons, were of gold; silver was thought too common for him to use.

Then Solomon had plenty of fine ships, and they used to sail away to other countries, and bring the king back whatever was beautiful or curious, that he could not get in Palestine. So king Solomon was richer and wiser than any of the other kings of the earth. People came from all parts to hear his wisdom, and every one who came brought him a present, silver, or gold, or handsome clothes, or armour, or sweet spices, horses or mules, so you are not surprised to hear that Solomon was as famous for his riches, as for his wisdom.

What had made Solomon so wise? You know this was God's doing. He had promised it in the dream, when Solomon had his choice, and so it was, that Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. Many of his wise sayings were written down, and

have been saved for us to read now. They are called the "Proverbs of Solomon," and when you are old enough to learn a part of the Bible by heart, you can not do better than learn some of these.

I told you that people came from all parts of the world to see and hear this famous king Solomon. There was a woman called the Queen of Sheba. She lived a long way off, and could scarcely believe all the wonderful stories that were told of this king of Israel. So she thought that she would go herself, and try to puzzle him with difficult questions.

She took a number of servants and camels to carry rich presents of spices and gold, and she set out for Solomon's country, Palestine, or the Land of Canaan, as it used to be called. After a long journey she reached Jerusalem, when she came before the king and told him truly the reason of her visit. But whatever question she asked, no matter how difficult it might be, Solomon had always a proper answer ready—nothing puzzled him.

The Queen of Sheba was very surprised at this, and when Solomon took her all over the Temple and his palace, and showed her besides his grand treasures, she was quite confused with it all. She said,

“All that I heard in my own country of your wisdom and riches was true; still I did not believe it, until I came and saw it with my own eyes; now I find that the half was not told me, for you are wiser and richer than ever I heard. How happy are your people to have you always with them, for they can continually listen to your wise sayings!”

Then she gave Solomon rich presents, and he told her to choose whatever she liked from his treasures. After this she took leave of him and turned and went back to her own country, she and her servants.

CHAPTER XXX.

SOLOMON'S OLD AGE.

1 KINGS xi., xii.

I AM afraid, dear children, you will say that all my stories lately have something sad in them; for many of the people I talk to you about were good at first, but got wicked by-and-bye. But you must remember mine are all true stories, the histories of people who really lived; so you must not expect to hear that they were always good. I am only too glad when I can tell you that they were truly sorry for their sins, like David, as then God could forgive them.

I think you will be surprised as well as sad to hear, that when Solomon got old, all his wisdom did not keep him good. Like

Esau and Samson, who chose their wives only because they were beautiful, and did not think it mattered whether they were good women, so Solomon, because he was rich, took many wives. Some of these women did not worship the true God; but served idols, and Solomon was wicked and foolish enough in his old age to do as they did, and forget the God who had been so good to him. Not only did he allow these "strange women" to build altars to their false idols, and offer sacrifices on them in the sight of all the people; but, dreadful to say, he, too, sometimes prayed to these idols instead of to God. Was not this a fearful example to the people?

God was very angry with Solomon, and told him, "As you have not kept My commandments, but have worshipped idols, when you die, your son shall be king over only a very small part of Canaan, all the rest shall be taken from him by one of your servants. If it were not for My servant David's sake, he should not even have this small portion."

When Solomon heard these words, he must have felt very sad, for he knew that he deserved this severe punishment, still he could not have been sorry in the right way, or he would have sent away all his wives who served idols. He did not do this, but lived on the same life for a few years, until he died. He had no peace; for besides his unhappy conscience, God sent enemies, who troubled him; so I think he must have been thankful to God when the time came for him to die.

Is it not a dreadful thing to read of Solomon growing wicked when he got old? *You*, dear children, the older you grow, the better I hope you will be. God expects more from you each year, as you get older and wiser; so make up your minds not to be like Solomon, or you may not find the road to heaven.

When Solomon was dead, God's words came true. His son, who was called "Rehoboam" (rather a long name for you to remember) was made king, just as the eldest son of the last king always is now-a-

days. But Rehoboam was unkind and selfish to his people; so when "Jeroboam," one of Solomon's servants, said he would be king too, the people were glad of it, and very few preferred Rehoboam. Of all the twelve tribes that you read of, who filled the land of Canaan, only two remained true to Rehoboam. Their names were Judah and Benjamin; and Rehoboam was called "the king of Judah," and Jeroboam "the king of Israel;" so from this time Canaan had two kings. This was God's punishment because Solomon had disobeyed Him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HOLY DAYS.

1 KINGS xii. LEVITICUS xxiii.

Now, I told you that Rehoboam, Solomon's son, lost nearly all his father's kingdom. Only two tribes instead of twelve, called him king. Still, do you know, he was better off than Jeroboam. Can you tell me why? Jerusalem, with the holy Temple remained for him, and if he had liked to be good he might still have been happy; but, as I said before, he was unkind to his people. He tried to get a great deal of money (or "taxes," as we ought to say) from them to spend on his own pleasures. When they complained, he would not listen to the advice of the old men, who had lived in his father's time, and had

heard his wise sayings ; so his reign was a miserable one.

Did I tell you before, that the people used to come up from all parts of Canaan to the Temple, three times a year. Moses had commanded this when he made the Tabernacle ; and everyone was to bring an offering, according to what he could afford. God would think just as much of a little pigeon, or dove, laid on His altar, as He would of a whole ox, or sheep. The three times in the year that the people came up were our three great holidays, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

I wonder if you remember what I said to you a long time ago of three festivals. I should now like to tell you about two other holy days you ought to hear of.

The first is called New Year. Its very name will help you a little to understand it, as I daresay you know that the first day in every year is called the New Year. Well, my dear children, our holy New Year is the world's birthday, and as God wishes us never to forget His grand work of the

Creation, He ordered us, through His faithful servant Moses, to keep the first day in every year, as a very holy festival. No work is to be done on it, beautiful prayers are read in our Synagogue, and the trumpet or "shofar" is blown there.* You will of course, want to know why this "shofar" is blown; there are many reasons, but I shall only tell you some of them.

I said that the New Year was the *world's* birthday. Well, when *you* have a birthday, don't imagine you have nothing else to do on it besides receiving presents, and being wished many happy returns of the day. As soon as ever you are old enough to think, you should, when the birthday comes, sit down quietly and say to yourself, "What have I done that is not right, during this last year of my life?" Then, when you have found out your faults, you must make up your mind to correct them and do better for the future.

So it is on the world's birthday, the New Year. Old and young must all think

* LEVITICUS xxiii. 24.

over their past time, find out where they have done wrong, and resolve to act better in the coming year. They must pray to God for help and He will give it them. Well, the horn is blown to remind us of our duties, and also to prepare us for the great fast day that is coming, and which you shall hear about directly. The "shofar" itself is made of a ram's horn, to remind us of the binding of Isaac, who was willing to give up his life to God. You remember, I hope, how God would not allow Abraham to sacrifice his only son, and a ram was offered in stead. Let this teach you, dear children, to be ready to give up everything to God, even your lives, should He require it.

The trumpet was always sounded when a new king was crowned, therefore, now at the commencement of a New Year, the "shofar" is blown, to remind us that God is our king, and that we must obey all His commands.

You know I told you how the trumpet was blown when God came down to Mount

Sinai to give the commandments, and all the people trembled at the awful sound. Now, my dear children, I do not want you to feel frightened at the sound of the "shofar," or horn, when it is blown in Synagogue on the New Year, but I do wish you to be very serious and thoughtful. Find out what your faults are; whether you have done your best to please your parents or teachers, if you have been kind to your little companions; or if on thinking it over, you see you have given way to temper, or perhaps been selfish or lazy,—confess your faults to God, ask Him to help you to grow better in future, make up your mind to do all you can in your own power towards this; then you will be keeping the New Year as God desires. The New Year is sometimes called the "Day of Memorial," or sometimes the "Day of Sounding the Cornet."

Ten days after the New Year we have our most sacred day in the whole twelve months. It is called the Day of Atonement, and young as you are, I want

you quite to see how entirely different it is to any of the other holy days or festivals that we Jews keep. God ordered this day purely out of love and kindness to us ; it is to be spent in prayer and fasting ; I need scarcely say that no manner of work is allowed to be done on it, in fact it is called a Sabbath of Sabbaths. To *fast*, means to take no food of any kind. Perhaps you little ones may say, "How strange ! what does God wish us to fast for ?" I will show you. When we go without food for a day, we become weak and faint, we find out what poor helpless creatures we are, we understand the difference between our *mortal* selves and God's *immortal* being, and we see how thoroughly we depend on Him for all we have.

Then, dears, remember, that however wicked we may have been, if we truly and thoroughly repent, God will forgive us ; and when can one better think over the past, and make good resolves for the future, than on such a day, as this day of Atonement, which God in His love has appointed for

us, and when our very weakness seems to draw us nearer to our Father? This was the only day in the year when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies.

The ten days from the New Year to the Day of Atonement are called the "Days of Penitence." During them we should by prayer and thought prepare ourselves for the great and holy day of Atonement.

Be sorry for your faults—confess them, and pray to God to give you strength to conquer them. If you have done wrong to any of your companions, it is not enough to confess your sin or even feel sorry for it; you must besides *atone* for it, that is, you must make it right with your little friend, before you dare ask God for His forgiveness. If you do this, you little children, who are not old or strong enough to fast, you will still be keeping God's command and following His will.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JEROBOAM AND THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET.

1 KINGS xii., xiii.

Now Jeroboam, the king of Israel, thought to himself, "If my people, those who have just made me king, go up to Jerusalem so often, they may perhaps get to like Rehoboam again, so they will get rid of me and have him for their king. I must prevent this."

See what a wicked thing he did! He made two golden calves, and set them up in different towns, as idols for the people to worship. Then he said, "It is too far for us to go up to Jerusalem to pray; here are your gods that you can worship."

The people did as the king told them. It was very wicked of them, but it was more

wicked of Jeroboam to entice them to do wrong. God is always more angry with you, if you persuade other children to do what is wrong, than He is when you sin yourself. Remember this if you want God to love you. You shall see in what way He showed Jeroboam how displeased He was.

One day Jeroboam was standing before the altar that he had built for one of the two golden calves. He had a censer in his hand, and he was burning sweet incense in it. Then God sent one of His prophets to tell him how wicked he was, and he said, "This shall be a sign that the Lord has sent me to you: this very altar on which you dare to sacrifice to a false god, shall be torn down, and the ashes shall be poured out on the ground."

Jeroboam was in a great passion, when he heard the prophet's words. He called out to his servants, "Lay hold of him," and he put out his hand himself to seize the prophet. Then suddenly his hand dried up—it was stiff and dead—he could not pull it back again to his side.

At the same moment the altar was broken up, and the ashes ran out on the ground. Jeroboam was now indeed frightened, and he said to the man of God, as Pharaoh did to Moses when the plagues came, "Oh, do pray to the Lord and ask Him to heal me, that my hand may be again as it was before."

If any one had done you an injury, would you be ready to pray for them if they asked you? I hope so, dear child! At all events the prophet was; he entreated God to forgive Jeroboam. God granted his prayer, and his hand became all right again. Jeroboam was grateful to the prophet, but he forgot that it was God he ought to have thanked for being well again, and he begged the prophet to come into his palace and sit down to a feast and take away a present with him. But the messenger of God said, "If you were to offer me half of all your treasures, I would not go with you, for God has told me not to eat or drink here, but to return home at once."

So he left Jeroboam, and on his way

home, an old prophet met him, and enticed him to come to his house. At first he refused, but I am sorry to tell you, after some persuasion, he disobeyed God's command and went into the old man's house and "did eat and drink." Whilst he was sitting at the table, God's word came to the old prophet, and he said to the disobedient one, "Thus saith the Lord, How is it that you have dared to disobey me? Did I not forbid you to eat or drink until you had reached your own house? You shall die."

Quickly the punishment came. He had scarcely started off on his ass, when a lion came out and killed him. Now, you know that the lion is a very fierce animal, and generally eats whatever it kills, but it was not so this time. God had sent the lion to make His word come true. The prophet was to die for his disobedience, and this was the wonderful sight that some men saw as they passed by — the dead body of the disobedient prophet lying on the ground, the ass standing quietly by his

dead master's side, unhurt, and the lion standing there too.

Now, dear children, you know there are no lions in the country we live in, so however disobedient you may be, a lion can not be sent to kill you, but you see how angry God is with those who do not obey Him, so mind you do not make Him angry with you.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ELIJAH AND THE FAMINE.

1 KINGS xiii., xvi., xvii.

Now, you would think, after all I told you of in the last chapter, that Jeroboam would have given up worshipping the golden calves, and would have returned to God; but, I am sorry to say, he did not. He went on in his old way, sinning up to the very end; so when he died, I am afraid there was punishment instead of heaven waiting for him.

His son, who was king after him, was wicked too, and so were all the kings of Israel; for the golden calves were left where Jeroboam had placed them, and the kings and the people used to worship and sacrifice before them, instead of to the true God.

I shall not talk to you about all these bad kings, only there is one I must tell you of, for two reasons ; firstly, there never was such a wicked man as he, and secondly, in his time lived a very, very great prophet.

The king's name was Ahab. Not only did he do all that was wicked like the king before him, but he displeased God besides, by taking for his wife a woman who worshipped idols. Her name was "Jezebel;" Queen Jezebel, you must call her. Her father was a king, and in his country the idol the people prayed to, was called Baal. Jezebel was a terribly wicked woman, and as Ahab was bad too, to please her, he built a temple to her false god Baal, and planted a beautiful grove of trees round it. This was not all. A number of his servants he made priests of Baal, so that they might offer sacrifices on Baal's altar, as the priests of God did in the Temple.

Ahab did not destroy the golden calves that Jeroboam had made ; so you can fancy that the people did not see much to remind them of the true God. Still, I am glad to

tell you that a great many did keep faithful to God, and would not pray to the idols as the king and queen did. This made Ahab and Jezebel very angry. They hated everybody who was good, they wanted to make them all as bad as themselves, and they tried to kill those people who served God ; so that they had to hide away in the woods or caves. But some of the Israelites were very brave, and did not fear Ahab. There was one good man, Obadiah, who hid a hundred prophets in a cave, and brought them food every day, until it was safe for them to go somewhere else.

But the man whom the king and queen hated most of all, was the good prophet, who, I told you, lived at this time. His name was Elijah. He loved God truly, and was not afraid of Ahab and Jezebel; but was always ready to bring them a message from God, although it was often a very angry one.

At last God was so provoked with Ahab, that he sent Elijah to him with these words, "There shall be no rain in the land for years, until I send it."

Now, can you picture to yourself what this meant? Have you ever thought of how we should get on without rain? If God never sent rain we should die, for nothing in the ground would grow. What use would it be for the farmer to sow the seed, or for the gardener to plant anything for food? The seed would not sprout, and the plants would die, if they had no water. Just as we get thirsty, so do they.

But now this plague had come on Israel because of Ahab's great wickedness. For three years no rain fell. At first the little brooks dried up, one by one, and then even some of the bigger rivers began to fail. Most of the cattle must have died, and the people, too, were perishing of famine.

Do you not want to know where Elijah was all this time? You may be sure that if Ahab or Jezebel could have found out, his life would not have been worth much; so, as soon as he had given his message to Ahab, God told him, "Go away now, and hide yourself by the brook called Cherith, near the river Jordan."

Elijah obeyed and went to Cherith, where he had the water of the brook to drink, and what do you think he did for food? God sent ravens, who brought him bread and meat every night and morning. Ravens, you know, are very large, strong birds. So the ravens fed Elijah. But after a while all the water in the brook was dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of God came to Elijah, saying, "Go now to Zarepheth in Zidon (Zidon was Jezebel's country) to the house of a widow woman. She will give you food."

So Elijah rose up, and went to Zarepheth. As he came to the gate of the city, he saw a widow woman gathering sticks together. He was very thirsty, as you can imagine; so he called to her, "Fetch me, I pray you, a little water to drink."

She was going off to get some for him, when he called to her, "Bring me, I beg you, a little morsel of bread too."

The poor woman answered him, "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a piece of

bread in the house. All that I have is a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse (a cruse means a pitcher or jug), and you see that now I am gathering sticks, that I may make a fire to bake some bread for my son and me, and when we have eaten it, we shall die because of the famine."

Then Elijah said, "Fear not. Do as you have said; but first make me a little cake, and then bake one for yourself and your son. For the Lord God of Israel says, The barrel of meal shall not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the land."

So she went and did according to the prophet's words; and there was bread for her, and Elijah, and her son, for many days, for the meal and the oil lasted.

After some time the widow's son fell ill, and, sad to say, instead of getting better, he became gradually worse and worse, until at last he died. His mother was in dreadful trouble, and came to Elijah, saying quite angrily, "Is this a punishment you have brought on me for my sins?"

Then the prophet answered her, "Give me your son."

He took the dead child from her, and carried him in his arms, up to the top of the house to a little room that he lived in, and laid him down on his own bed. Then Elijah prayed to God, and asked Him, "Hast thou sent this trouble on the woman?" He then stretched himself over the child three times, and cried out, "O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come back to him again."

The Lord listened to the good man's cry, and the child's soul did come back to him again. He was no longer dead, he lived.

Elijah took the child, and brought him down to his mother, saying to her, "See your son is alive."

And the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are really a man of God, and that the word of God in your mouth is truth."

Before this she had been an idolator; but now that she saw what wonders Elijah's God could work, you may be sure she

never prayed again to images, but to our true God.

You see what good can be done by prayer. Of course, what you have just heard of was a miracle, and there are no miracles now-a-days ; but God is just as ready as ever to listen to us when we cry to Him ; so, dear children, if you are unhappy pray to Him, if you have been wicked, pray to Him ; or if you are ill, pray to Him. No good can come to you, if you grow up without praying to your dear Father in heaven.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AHAB AND ELIJAH.

1 KINGS xviii.

ELIJAH stayed some time at the poor widow's house, whilst the famine lasted, for no rain had come yet, but her oil and flour never failed, as the prophet had promised her, so it was, she had always enough for her own and his use.

All this while Ahab and Jezebel did not know where Elijah was, but at last God said to Elijah, "Go and show yourself to Ahab."

If Ahab and Jezebel had only known where Elijah was, they would surely have sent for him and killed him, for as no rain had come, the famine had got worse and worse, and all this misery, Ahab was wicked

enough to say, was Elijah's fault. Ahab managed to get food for himself always, but he could not for his horses, and now the grass was so scarce, that he had actually started out with his good servant Obadiah (you heard of him before) to try and find a little grass, as his horses were dying for want of it.

So Ahab went one way, and Obadiah the other. Presently, as Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah threw himself on the ground before him and said, "Are you, my lord, Elijah?"

Elijah answered, "I am; go tell your master, Behold, Elijah is here."

Now, do you think Obadiah liked having this message given him? Not at all, my dear children, for he thought, "Elijah never means to give himself up to Ahab, who is looking for him everywhere so as to kill him. When I return from giving my message, God will have sent him somewhere else, and Ahab, who is very cruel, will kill me, because there is no Elijah to be found."

So Obadiah said to the prophet, "Oh,

why do you send me on such an errand? What have I done that Ahab should slay me, and he surely will in his anger, if you are not here when he comes to meet you. You know that I fear God, and wish to serve Him. Did I not hide a hundred prophets in a cave and feed them; so now do you wish me to die by Ahab's hand?"

Then Elijah answered him, "As the Lord of Hosts liveth, I will surely show myself to Ahab to-day."

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him Elijah's words. Do you expect that Ahab came to Elijah? Yes, at once; for he was getting frightened at the famine lasting so long; and, wicked as he was, he still knew that Elijah's words were true, and you remember, I daresay, dear children, that Elijah had said, "There shall be no rain in Israel, until I speak the word."

So the wicked, proud king came to meet God's prophet. Listen to Ahab's words as he saw him, "Are you the man who troubles Israel?"

Elijah answered, "*I* have not troubled

Israel; *you* are the man. You have disobeyed God's laws and made Him so angry that 'He has shut up the heavens, and kept back the rain in its due season,'* so that the ground has not given food. Now, send and gather to me in Mount Carmel your prophets of Baal, who eat at the Queen's table."

Ahab was too frightened to disobey Elijah's command. He sent word to the false prophets to come to the mountain, and all the people followed them, to see what was going to happen.

* The Shemang.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MOUNT CARMEL AND THE FALSE PROPHETS.

1 KINGS xviii.

ARE not you curious, too, dear children, to know what Elijah wanted with these wicked priests of Baal? He intended to show the people how foolish, as well as sinful they had been, in praying to Baal instead of to God.

In the morning early, Elijah, with Ahab the king, and the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty of them, went to this Mount Carmel, and the people stood round. Then Elijah called out to them, "I have brought you here, that you may see for yourselves which is the true God. Here are two bullocks; let the priests of Baal (there are plenty of them) choose first.

They can take whichever they like, and the one that they leave shall be for me. Let them make an altar to lay the bull upon. I will do the same presently, and whichever of the two animals shall be burnt by fire from heaven, *that* God who sends it, you shall own, is the true God."

When the people heard Elijah's words, they all answered him, and said, "It is well spoken."

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Now you choose your bullock for yourselves, get it ready for the sacrifice, then call on the name of your gods; but remember you are not to put any fire under it."

So the priests of the false god took their bull, and dressed it, and kept praying to their idol from early morning until the middle of the day. "O Baal, hear us!" they cried; but Baal could not hear, so there was no voice—no answer came. How should it, dear children? Of course Elijah knew that a false god, an idol, could neither hear nor speak, and he felt very happy, for

soon the people would return to the God of Israel.

Then he mocked at Baal's prophets, and said to them, "Why do you not cry louder to your god? Perhaps he is talking, or on a journey, or he may even be asleep and must be roused."

These priests thought Elijah really meant what he said; so they called yet louder and louder, "O Baal, hear us!"

And they cut themselves until the blood ran from their bodies. If they had served the true God, they would not have done this; for our God has forbidden us in the "Law" to do such a thing;* but I suppose they thought it might please their god Baal, and that when he saw them suffering this pain, he would show himself to them.

But it was all useless; the morning passed away, the afternoon had gone, now it was evening. Still no sign of Baal. The bullock was lying on the altar, but no voice had answered--no fire had been sent to burn it.

* DEUTERONOMY, xiv. 1.

Then Elijah felt that his turn had come. He said to the people, "Come near unto me."

So all the people drew close to him, and they saw him take twelve stones; that was one for each of the tribes of Israel, and with these he built an altar to God. He made a "trench," or trough, as perhaps you would call it, all round the altar to hold water. Next, he put some wood on this, and then laid the dead bullock on the wood.

Now you will see the reason for Elijah's making the trench. He told the people to take a quantity of water, and pour it over the bull and the wood. Three times they did this, until it was all thoroughly wet, and the water ran off and stopped in the trench that Elijah had made all round the altar.

Now if you or I were getting ready a fire that we wanted to burn well, we should take care to have the wood and everything about it as dry as possible, or we should say it would never light; but I dare say you can guess Elijah's reason for acting in such a contrary way. He wanted these

foolish Israelites to see for themselves, that he was in no way helping the sacrifice to burn, but rather he was hindering it.

When all this had been done, Elijah began to pray to his God. He said, "O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, and turn this people's heart back again."

Elijah prayed from his heart, and God heard him.

At once came the answer, not in words, but in what the people must see for themselves was a sure sign which was the God to be prayed to.

Fire fell, and the sacrifice and the wood laid under it, and the stones of the altar, and even the water which was in the trench were all burnt up.

When all the people saw this wonderful sight, they fell on their faces, and they said, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!"

Then Elijah called out to the people, "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape."

So they took them and brought them down to the brook Kishon, and there Elijah slew them. They should no longer lead the people to worship false gods. It could not have been very pleasant for Ahab to be obliged to watch all this; but he was too frightened of Elijah to say a word, and when the prophet told him, "Get thee up, eat and drink; for we shall soon have abundance of rain," Ahab obeyed him at once, whilst Elijah, with his servant, returned to the top of Mount Carmel.

Here he threw himself down on the ground, and prayed earnestly. After a time he said to his servant, "Go up, now, and look towards the sea."

The man did so, and said, "There is nothing."

Then Elijah said, "Go again seven times."

Six times did the servant cast his eyes seaward, but nothing was in sight. At last, the seventh time, he said, "There is a little

cloud, not larger than a man's hand, rising out of the sea."

Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, Prepare your chariot, and go down, or the rain will stop you."

Very soon the sky was black with clouds and wind, and then there was a great rain. The dry and thirsty earth was once more moist. Now the famine would be over, and soon food would grow again for man and beast. And Ahab rode in his chariot back to Jezreel, the city where the wicked queen Jezebel lived. Elijah went with him; for so the Lord had commanded him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ELIJAH IN THE WILDERNESS.

1 KINGS xix.

YOU may be sure that Ahab had not been back long in Jezreel, before he had told Jezebel all that had happened lately. When she heard how Elijah had killed all her priests of Baal, she was in a terrible rage. She sent a servant to Elijah, with this message,

“By this time to-morrow your life shall be worth no more than one of those whom you have slain.”

When Elijah heard these savage words, he saw that he had better run away to save his life. So he left Jezreel, and soon he found himself in the wilderness. Not a very cheerful place, you will agree with me,

to be in, all alone; so it is not surprising that Elijah felt very sad and disheartened. He sat down under a juniper tree, and prayed to God to let him die. But God meant him to live; He had still work for him to do. Presently as he slept, an angel came to him, touched him, and said, "Arise and eat."

Elijah opened his eyes, and saw a cake or loaf just baked on some coals, and a cruse of water.

He ate and drank, and then laid down again to sleep. Once more the angel came and touched him, and when he awoke, he told him, "Arise and eat again, for there is a long journey before you."

So Elijah took more food, which so refreshed him that he was able to go on for forty days and forty nights without anything more to eat. God gave him strength. He spent his time in a cave on Mount Horeb. Then the word of the Lord came to him, "What do you here?"

Elijah answered, "I have been very unhappy. The children of Israel have for-

saken the Lord, and thrown down His altars, and slain His prophets; I, only I am left, and now they seek my life."

The voice answered him, "Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord."

Then came a great and strong wind, that broke even the rocks; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind was an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then came fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice. When Elijah heard this, he wrapped his face in his mantle; for he dared not *see* God. He stood at the entrance to the cave, and he heard the voice say, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah returned the same answer as before, "I have been very jealous for the Lord of Hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets. And now I, only I am left, and they seek my life to take it."

Then God comforted Elijah, and told

him, "There are still left many in Israel, who have not bowed down to Baal, but love me. And as for Ahab, you shall go and anoint someone else to be king in his place, for I will take the kingdom from him, because he is so wicked. You are, besides, to find a young man, named Elisha, and anoint him. He shall be prophet in your place when you die; so the people shall not be without some one to teach them what is right."

These words made Elijah feel quite happy. He left the wilderness, and soon found Elisha, the man whom he was to anoint as prophet. Elisha was ploughing with some oxen in a field. Oxen, as I told you once before, are still used in Palestine by the farmers, instead of horses.

When Elijah saw Elisha, he took off the cloak or mantle that he was wearing, and threw it round Elisha. Then Elisha left the oxen, and ran after the old prophet, and said: "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee."

You see Elisha felt that it was God who called him to go with Elijah, and he was joyful at the thought of it; but it was only natural he should wish to say good bye to his parents first; you would do the same, I am sure, my dear children.

So Elisha turned back and went home. He took two of the oxen he had been ploughing with, killed them, and had them boiled. Then he set them before his friends, to whom he wished to make a feast, then he bade them farewell, and arose and went after Elijah, and became his faithful servant.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AHAB AND NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

1 KINGS xxi.

YOU shall now hear of a very wicked thing that Ahab did, and how he was punished for it. You can fancy that, being a king, he was very rich. He had plenty of houses and gardens, and fields of his own; still this did not prevent him being covetous, as you will see.

Close by Ahab's palace in the city of Jezreel, was a beautiful "vineyard." Do you know what a vineyard is? I dare say not, as in England there are no vineyards, but you must know what grapes are. Well, a vineyard is a field, or garden, full of vines, on which grapes grow. This vineyard belonged to a man called Naboth. Ahab

thought he would like it for himself to make a garden of, so he went to Naboth and said, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near my house, and I will give you a better vineyard in exchange, or if you prefer it, you can have its value in money."

But Naboth said to Ahab: "I do not wish to sell my vineyard; it belonged to my father before me, so I will keep it."

This answer ought to have settled the matter. Naboth had a perfect right to do what he liked with his own ground, and Ahab should have been satisfied. But, no; the king came home both angry and unhappy. He threw himself down on his bed, and would not take any food. When Jezebel saw this, she said to her husband, "Why are you sad, and refuse to eat?"

Ahab answered, "I want Naboth's vineyard. I have been to him, and have offered him another for it, or to buy it of him, but he will not give it up; he says he wishes to keep it."

And Jezebel said : " Are you not king of Israel ? Arise, eat and be happy. I will get you Naboth's vineyard."

Ahab never asked Jezebel how she intended to manage this. He was so wicked, that it was quite enough for him that he was to get what he longed for ; he did not mind how it was brought about.

Now see what a horrible plan Jezebel had. She found two wicked men, who did not mind bearing false witness against their neighbour. These men came to the Judges and said that Naboth had used God's name sinfully, and had spoken against the king. Now, if any one was found doing such a thing, he was always put to death.

So the Judges said that Naboth was to be carried out of the city, and all the people were to throw stones at him until he died. Then poor Naboth was taken beyond the city gates, and stoned to death, and his blood ran down upon the ground where the dogs licked it up.

Soon the news was brought to Jezebel that Naboth was dead, so she went to

Ahab and said, "Naboth is dead, now you can go and take his vineyard."

And Ahab got up and went to Naboth's vineyard, and took it to himself for a garden. Now, God was very angry with Jezebel, for having poor innocent Naboth killed, and He was just as displeased with Ahab, because he had allowed his wife to write the letters to the Judges in his name, and to seal them with his seal. So the Lord called to Elijah, and told him to go to Ahab, and speak to him about what he had done.

You see Ahab did not long enjoy his coveted possession, for soon he saw the old prophet Elijah coming towards him, and he felt afraid.

"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy," were the words which greeted Elijah, as he approached the king. Elijah answered, "I have found you; now listen to God's message; you have killed, and you have taken possession. I have seen Naboth's blood, and just as the dogs licked it up, so shall they lick up yours and Jezebel's.

Your children, too, shall be killed in the streets, and the dogs shall eat their flesh, or, if they die in the fields, the birds of the air shall pick their bones. This is because you have followed Jezebel's wicked advice in worshipping idols, and you have done more wickedness than any one before you."

Were not these terrible words? Even Ahab was frightened; you see there was still his conscience to warn him, and now, at last, he saw how wicked he had been. He tore his clothes, put sackcloth upon his body, he fasted, and repented. Then God said to Elijah, "I see that Ahab has humbled himself before Me. I will not bring all the punishment on him, that I threatened. The destruction of his family shall not happen until after his death."

See how kind God is, even to sinners like Ahab. But Ahab, unfortunately, only repented for a time, so his punishment was only put off, it was certain to come by and bye.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AHAB'S AND JEZEBEL'S END.

1 KINGS xxii. 2 KINGS ix.

ABOUT three years after the sad death of Naboth, Ahab went out with the King of Judah to fight against a people who were living near him. Now, he had been warned by a prophet not to go forth, or he would be slain, but he would not listen to him, and preferred following the advice of the false prophets, who told him he was sure to be victorious. In fact, he was so angry with the true prophet, who said, if he valued his life, he had better remain at home, that he had him thrown into prison, where the governor had orders to feed him on bread and water, until Ahab returned.

So forth went the king in his chariot,

but in his heart he must have felt uneasy, although he would not confess it, for what do you think he did? He took off his royal robes, and put on plain clothes, that no one should recognize him, while he persuaded his friend, the King of Judah, to keep on his royal garments. He thought that he would escape by this means, although God, by His prophet, had said he would be killed.

Now, the Syrian king had commanded his captains to let all the others alone, and to do their best to kill the King of Israel. When they saw one man in royal robes, they, of course, thought he was the King of Israel and ran after him. When the King of Judah found the danger he was in, he cried out, then the captain knew he was not the King of Israel, and turned back.

But no man can escape by cunning the punishment that God has determined to bring upon him. With all his care, Ahab's last hour had come. A man in the Syrian host drew his bow at a venture, and it struck King Ahab, although he had covered

himself with armour. Then he said to the driver of his chariot, "You must turn and take me out of the battle, for I am wounded."

So they took him back to his own city of Samaria, but he died on the way, and his blood ran out of his wound into the chariot. Then they buried him in the city of Samaria. Nobody except Jezebel could have felt sorry at his death. His chariot I told you, was covered with his blood, so his servants took it and washed it in a pool of water, and the wild dogs of the city licked up the blood. Thus, you see, God's words came true, as they always do. He said that the dogs should lick up Ahab's blood as they had poor Naboth's, and you see they did.

And Jezebel—would you like to hear what became of her? She lived for a long time after Ahab, but she did not become better, two of her sons were Kings of Israel, one after the other, and she encouraged them, just as she had Ahab, in all sorts of wickedness. At last her end came,

and again you will see, how everything happened exactly as God said it would.

First, her son, the king, was slain by one of his own captains, and his body was thrown into that very garden, which had been made from Naboth's vineyard, and there the dogs and birds feasted on it. When the news of this reached the city where Jezebel lived, she was standing at a window looking out, her wicked face all covered with paint. The captain, who had just killed her son, lifted up his eyes and saw her there, he called out to some of her servants who were by her, "Throw her down." His words were instantly obeyed, they took her and threw her out of the window, so that she was dashed to pieces by the fall.

Was not this a horrible death? Her blood was sprinkled on the walls and on the horses, who were passing by in a chariot, and the horses trod her under foot. In this chariot was the same captain, who, I told you just now, had killed haughty Jezebel's son, the King of Israel. He

drove over her body in his chariot, and then went on to his house to eat and drink. Presently he sent some of his servants to bury her, but the dogs had eaten up all her flesh, nothing was to be found but a few bones, just those of her hands and feet and head.

This was God's punishment on Jezebel, for she had not only been wicked herself, but had made the people sin, by setting up idols to her false gods, and persuading Ahab too to worship them; then, remember, how she treated the good prophet Elijah; she tried hard to kill him, only because he was a good man. And then, when Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard, he might not have gone any further, but by her advice and acts, she led him into the sins of robbery and murder.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AHAZIAH AND THE THREE CAPTAINS.

2 KINGS i.

I TOLD you that when Ahab died, one of his sons was made king. His name was Ahaziah. With such wicked parents as Ahab and Jezebel, you will not be surprised to hear that he did not fear God. Baal was the god he worshipped. One day he was in a room upstairs, in his palace, when he fell out of the window, and was hurt so badly, that he did not know whether he could ever get well again. Now, instead of praying to God to cure him, he sent messengers to a city a long way off, to inquire of the priests of Baal whether he would recover. As they were going along, they met *God's* messenger. Can you guess

his name? It was Elijah. He stopped the king's servants, and said,

"Is it because there is not a God in Israel that you are going all the way to Ekron to inquire of Baal? Return to Ahaziah, for this is what God says to him—'Thou shalt not come down from the bed on which thou art, but shalt surely die.'"

So the messengers turned back, and when the king saw them, he said, "Why have you returned so soon?"

"We met a man," they answered, "who told us to turn back." Then they delivered the message.

"What sort of man was he," said the king, "who met you and spoke to you these words?"

"He was covered with animals' skins, and had a leather girdle (or belt) round his waist."

The king recognised him instantly by the description. "It is Elijah, the Tishbite."

The king was very angry at receiving such a message; he would have preferred

his servants going on to the idol's house; there he might have been given a pleasanter message. So he told one of his captains to take fifty men, and go and fetch Elijah. You see he had heard of some of the wonderful things the prophet had done, so he thought he would send a large party of men to make sure of bringing him back, for he meant to kill him.

Now the old prophet was sitting on the top of a hill, when he saw the king's messengers on the way to him. The captain called out, "Thou man of God, the king has said, Come down."

Elijah answered, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and destroy thee and thy fifty."

Then there came down fire from heaven, and destroyed the captain and his fifty soldiers. When Ahaziah found his servants did not return, he sent another captain and fifty men. He, too, called out to Elijah, "Oh, man of God, the king has said, Come down, quickly."

Elijah answered him in the same words

as he had the first captain, and just the same thing happened as before. Fire came down from heaven and burnt them all to death.

You would have thought that when Ahaziah heard of such terrible signs, by which God protected His prophet, that he would have left Elijah alone, and not risked the lives of any more of his servants. But like other wicked people, he would not give up his own desires. He wished to have Elijah in his power, so a third captain (with another fifty men) was sent off on the same errand as the two others.

How frightened this poor captain felt. He was obliged to obey the king, and he quite expected to die. So when he came in sight of Elijah, he threw himself on his knees before him, and cried, "I pray thee, let not my life and those of my men be taken, like those who have been sent before to thee."

Then God took pity on this captain, because he was humble, and He sent His angel to Elijah, with these words, "Go down with him. Be not afraid."

So Elijah arose from the mount, and went with the captain down to the city where Ahaziah lived. He was brought into the king's bedroom, and here he boldly repeated what he had before said, "Because you sent to the false god, Baal, instead of to the Lord's prophet, you shall not get up from the bed, where you are lying ill, but you shall die."

These words soon came true, for Ahaziah did die, and his brother was made king in his place.

CHAPTER XL.

ELIJAH GOES TO HEAVEN.

2 KINGS ii.

THE time had now come for Elijah to be taken away from his troubled life on earth, for you must remember, dear children, that in following out God's commands Elijah had passed through many trials. Ahab and Jezebel had often tried to kill him ; at times he had been faint for food, and many and weary were the days that he had spent alone, without a friend near him ; but he never forgot he had a loving Friend in heaven, and now heaven was to be opened to him—he was to reach it without the pain of dying.

Elijah knew this, so he went about from one place to another, encouraging the young prophets, giving them good advice,

and always followed by his faithful servant Elisha. Elijah now wished Elisha to leave him, before God took him to heaven, but Elisha said he would not part from his dear master until he was obliged, so, wherever Elijah went, Elisha went too. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee," were his words.

At last they came to the river Jordan. Fifty of the young prophets stood at a little distance off to watch their beloved master as far as they could, for they knew they should see him no more on earth. When Elijah and Elisha reached the Jordan, they stood for a while beside it. There Elijah took off his cloak, folded it together like a staff, then he struck the waters, and, like at the passage of the Red Sea, they divided, leaving a dry path, which they crossed over on dry land.

When they were on the other side, Elijah asked Elisha, "What can I do for you before I am taken away?"

Elisha said, "I pray you let a double portion of your spirit come to me."

You see all that Elisha desired was to be a great prophet like his noble master. There were many things he might have asked for, but he loved God truly, and was only anxious to make His will known to the people of Israel.

Elijah said, "You have asked a hard thing of me, but if you see me when I am taken, you shall have your desire granted."

They still walked on, but you may be sure that Elisha would not leave Elijah's side. No doubt as they talked together, the old prophet was giving his young friend and follower good advice, how to act when his guide shall have left him alone. And now a wonderful sight appears—a chariot of fire, with horses of fire; the loving master and faithful servant are parted—God's angels have come, and Elijah is taken to heaven. As Elisha looked at this wonderful sight, he called out, "My father; my father!" but the chariot goes on its way; it is soon out of sight, and Elisha is left alone on earth.

He felt very sad, and he tore his clothes.

Then he took up Elijah's cloak, which had fallen from him as he went to heaven. After this he turned and presently came to the Jordan. Here he stood a while, and taking Elijah's cloak, with it he smote the waters: they divided, and there was a dry path left in the middle. Elisha walked along this, and soon the river was crossed, when he drew near to the young prophets, whom he had left a short time before, as he had passed that way with Elijah. They all came to meet him, bowing to the ground, for they knew what had happened, and they called out, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha!"

CHAPTER XLI.

ELISHA AND THE POT OF OIL.

2 KINGS iv.

Now you shall hear a story of something wonderful that Elisha did, a miracle as we call it.

In one of the cities of Palestine (or Canaan) there was a woman living, whose husband had been a prophet. He was dead, and she had become poorer and poorer, until at last she had no money left at all, not even to pay what she owed. She had two sons, and the people to whom she was in debt, that is, owed money, came to take them for slaves, because she could not pay them. Poor creature! What could she do? You will say she did a very wise thing, for she came to Elisha.

She told him her story ; how her husband had been a good man, who loved God, but that he was dead, and she was now in sore trouble.

Elisha said, "What can I do for you ? What have you in your house ?"

"Not anything," she answered, "but one little pot of oil."

Then he said, "Go, borrow from your neighbours all the vessels you can, basins, jugs, cups, or anything of the kind, only be sure to get plenty. Then, when you have brought them home, shut the door, take the little pot of oil, and pour out from it into the borrowed vessels until they are full."

The poor widow did just as Elisha bade her. Her neighbours were only too glad to help her, as they were sorry to see her in such trouble, so they all lent her vessels, of one kind or another. These were carried to her house, the doors were closed, and as fast as her sons brought the empty vessels to her, she filled them with oil, which she kept pouring from the little pot, which you

know she had in the house. When they had brought her the last, she said, "Bring me yet another."

But they told her, "There is not one vessel remaining." So the oil left off running. Then she went to Elisha, the friend whom God had sent her when she had prayed to Him in her distress, and told him what had happened. He said, "Go, sell the oil, pay your debt, and what is left will buy food for you and your sons."

Who do you think it was, dear children, that made the oil to "multiply," that is, become more? God. Nothing escapes His eye, nor His ear. He will help anyone who is in trouble. The poor widow cried to Him, and He heard her voice, and sent her a friend in Elisha. If you are unhappy or in pain, pray to Him, tell Him all your trouble, and though He will not answer you in words, be sure He hears, and will do what is best to help you to happiness.

CHAPTER XLII.

ELISHA AND THE SHUNAMMITE.

2 KINGS iv.

Now, my dear children, I hope you remember that I told you Elisha used to travel about to the different cities of Canaan, telling the people of the true God, and trying to keep them from worshipping idols; for sad to say, many of them brought offerings and laid them before the two golden calves that Jeroboam had set up, when he made himself king after Solomon's death, and took part of the kingdom away from Solomon's son, Rehoboam.

One of the places that Elisha often stopped at, was called Shunem. Here, in a house close to the wall of the city, lived a famous woman. She was rich and good,

and when she found that Elisha visited her city, she persuaded him to come into her house and set food before him for him to eat. After this, whenever he passed through Shunem, she persuaded him to come to her again. Then she said to her husband, "I see that this is a holy man of God, who passeth through Shunem so often. Let us make a little room for him on the wall, that we may always have him for a guest when he is in Shunem."

Her husband said, she might certainly do this if she liked. So a room was prepared, and the good "Shunammite," as the woman was called, placed a bed in it for the prophet, and a table, candlestick and stool for him to use.

The next time after this that Elisha came to Shunem, he was taken into the little chamber that had been so lovingly got ready for him, and very grateful he was for the kind thought as well as the kind deed, as he laid himself down in his bed to rest. He called his servant Gehazi to him. Please to remember this name, as

you will hear of Gehazi again in the stories I shall tell you of Elisha.

“Go speak to this Shunammite,” said Elisha.

Gehazi called her, and she stood before Elisha. Then the prophet said, “You have been very kind and taken a great deal of trouble for us. What can we do for you? Shall I speak to the king in your favour?”

But the Shunammite did not wish to leave her home, even if the king would give her some grander place in his palace. She was a good, happy, contented woman, satisfied with her humble lot; so she answered, “I dwell among my own people.”

Elisha then said to his servant,* “What then is to be done for her?”

Gehazi answered, “She has no child; surely she would like to have one.”

Elisha said, “Call her.”

She came and stood in the doorway, and

* From this it would seem that the Shunammite stood before Elisha and his servant, but that the fashion in Eastern countries prevented the prophet from speaking to her directly; he did it through his servant.

Elisha said to her, "In a little while you shall have a son."

She could scarcely believe that such happiness was coming to her, so she said to Elisha, "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not deceive me." Elisha, as you know, meant what he promised, and a few months after, a dear little baby was born to her. How delighted the father and mother must have been! How they must have praised God for His goodness! I wonder if you remember a story something like this, I told you of in the history of the Judges of Israel? I mean the angel promising Manoah's wife a son, Samson as he was called.

Well, the little baby grew, and one day, when he was old enough, his father, who was a farmer, took him out with him into his fields, where the harvest was being gathered in. The little fellow had not been out long when he became ill and was in pain. He cried out to his father, "My head, my head."

His father said to a lad, "Carry him to

his mother." So they brought him to his mother, and she nursed him on her lap until twelve o'clock in the day, and then the child died.

The poor mother ! Are you not grieved for her ? I told you she was a good woman, and now you will see for yourselves I was right in saying so. You deserve no praise for being good, when everything goes as you wish, but it is when God tries you, by taking from you what you like, or love, and everything seems to go contrary—*then* if you are not rebellious or cross, you may be called truly good. And so it was with the Shunammite. See how she behaved when God took her darling little boy from her. Without one word of murmur, she took her child, carried him up to the room she had set aside for Elisha, laid him on the prophet's bed, shut the door, and then went to her husband.

She said to him, "I want to go to the man of God ; send me one of the young men and an ass, that I may get to him, and return quickly."

Her husband said, "Why will you go to-day? It is not Sabbath nor New Moon."

All she answered was, "Peace."

Then she saddled the ass, and she and her servant got on it, and she said to the man, "Drive and go forward as quickly as you can; do not stop unless I bid you."

So she went and presently came to Mount Carmel, where Elisha was then living. Mount Carmel—I hope you remember the beautiful story I told you of Mount Carmel and Elijah, and the prophets of Baal.

When Elisha saw the Shunammite at a distance, he said to Gehazi, "See, here is the Shunammite coming, run to meet her, and say, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?"

Gehazi did as he was bid, and to all his questions she answered, "It is well."

Can you understand this? You would have expected her to say, "It is *not* well, for my child is dead," but she was such a good woman, that she knew, that whatever

God did, must be well done, even although it caused her bitter pain.

When she had answered Gehazi, she passed on and came to Elisha, who was on the hill. She threw herself at his feet, and Gehazi, who had followed, tried to push her away; but Elisha said, "Leave her alone. She is in trouble; but I do not know what is wrong, for the Lord has not told me."

You see that all Elisha's wisdom came from God, and, great man as he was, he did not mind confessing his ignorance. God had not shown him that the child was dead. Then the woman said to Elisha, "Did I ask my lord to send me a son? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?"

Then he said to Gehazi, "Take my staff in your hand, and go to Shunem; but do not speak to anyone on the way, and lay my staff on the face of the child."

But the poor mother was not to be satisfied with this. She had heard of the wonders or "miracles" that the prophet had worked; but she had no faith in his ser-

vant. I cannot tell you if she knew that Gehazi was not a good man; but he was not, as you will see by-and-bye. So she said to Elisha, "As my Lord liveth, and as my soul liveth (and you know the soul *never* dies) I will not leave you."

So he arose and followed after her.

Now Gehazi had passed on before them, right into the room where the child had been placed by his mother; but, although he had laid the staff across him, no sound was heard.

"The child had not awaked."*

Presently Elisha reached the house, and at once went into his chamber, where the child was laid upon his bed, quite dead. He wished to be alone; so he shut the door and prayed to the Lord that the child might live again. Then he went up to the bed, and laid upon the child, so that his mouth was upon the child's mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; he stretched himself upon the child. Then the child's flesh began to get warm.

* 2 KINGS iv., 31.

Elisha now left the room, and walked about the house. Then he came up again to the little room, and stretched himself once more over the child. The child sneezed seven times; at last opened his eyes. The prophet, with God to help him, had made the child alive again. Then he called Gehazi, and said, "Call this Shunammite."

And when she had come, Elisha said to her, "Take up thy son."

The poor woman could not answer him; her heart was too full of gratitude and happiness; so she fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took up her boy from off the bed, and went out.

Was not this a wonderful thing for Elisha to be able to do? You see God had promised that, when Elijah was taken to heaven, Elisha should be a great prophet in his place, and God's promises always come true. God let Elisha work even more miracles than Elijah. Can you believe when you hear of all these wonders that there were still people in the land of Palestine who did not pray to God? But

so it was; and remember, dear children, that although you do not kneel down and say your prayers to idols like some of these sinful, foolish Israelites did, you offend God sometimes quite as much, when you pray to Him with your lips, but let your thoughts be on other things. He would rather listen to a few words spoken to Him from your heart, than to whole pages repeated from the Prayer-book without proper feelings.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ELISHA AND NAAMAN.

2 KINGS V.

WOULD you like to hear a story about a man called Naaman? I am sure you would; so I will tell it you. This Naaman was captain to the king of Syria. Syria is a country quite close to Palestine. The Syrians were idolators, and they were enemies of the Israelites, and often fought them. When they got the best of it, they carried away any of the Israelites they could, and made slaves of them.

Naaman was a brave honorable man, and the king, his master, was very fond of him, because he had served him well; but a great trouble had come upon Naaman. He was a leper. I mean he had the horrible

disease, leprosy. You heard of it in the history of Moses. When God was sending Moses to the children of Israel, one of the signs he had to show them was his hand becoming white with leprosy, and then turning right again. It was a frightful disease; all the body was covered with white sores that ate into the flesh. Those who had it were obliged to live away from everyone else.

So Naaman was very miserable. All his riches were of no use to him; for he could not get cured of his complaint. Now, among the Israelites who had been brought away from their own country, was a little maiden. She was a slave, and had to wait upon Naaman's wife. She was very sorry to see Naaman so ill, and one day she said, "Oh! would that my lord were with the prophet in Samaria; for he would cure him of his leprosy."

Naaman was told of this, so he thought he would try this wonderful Elisha, as none of the doctors in his own country had done him any good. So away he went, with rich

presents of money and clothes for the man who should cure him. Elisha was glad when he heard that he was coming. He said, "Let him now come, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

Do you think that Elisha was so joyful because he wanted the Syrians to see what a clever man he was? No, my dear children; Elisha had no pride in his own cleverness. He knew that it was God who made him able to work wonders, and he was only too pleased if he could teach these heathens how great the true God was. The only pride Elisha had was proper pride. When the famous Syrian captain drove up to his door with his grand chariot and horses, Elisha did not even trouble to come down and speak to him, but sent a messenger to him with these words, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come again to you and you shall be clean."

But Naaman was very angry; he said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of

the Lord his God, and move his hands over my body, and the leprosy would go away. Are not the rivers in my own country better than those of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?"

Then he turned and went away in a great rage.

You see he was vexed that Elisha had not made more fuss over him. So one of his servants came and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some difficult thing, would you not have done it? How much rather then when he only said, 'Wash, and be clean.'"

I suppose Naaman thought the man was right, for he listened to his advice, went to the river Jordan, bathed himself in it seven times, and then Elisha's words came true, his flesh was clean and pure, like that of a little child—all the horrible leprosy had gone.

How thankful Naaman felt now that he had done as Elisha had told him; he was very sorry that he had been in such a rage, and back he came to the man of God, and

there, before all his servants who stood around him, he said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth but the God of Israel."

Do you see, my dear children, how wisely Elisha had acted in sending Naaman away before, without even seeing him? Had he come down when Naaman was at his door in his chariot, and laid his hands upon him, and asked God to cure him, Naaman, who was an idolater, might have given Elisha the credit, and not have believed that it was God who had made him well. But now he saw the truth, and openly declared that he would never again pray to any but the God of Israel.

Then Naaman wanted to leave Elisha a rich present, but Elisha was not willing to accept it, for he was God's servant, and to Him only would he look for a reward.

Would Elisha receive a reward from God, do you think? Yes, dear children. In good time God would reward him, even as He will you. A happy life for ever in Heaven is the reward you can feel sure of,

if you are good for the short time you have to spend on this earth; I call it a short time, for even if it should please God to let you grow to be old, your years here will be very short, in comparison with the life without death, that you will enjoy in Heaven.

CHAPTER XLIV.

GEHAZI, OR THE LIE.

2 KINGS v.

A LONG time ago you had a story about a covetous man. Do you remember it? Achan was his name. Well, now, we have come to somebody who was worse than Achan. It was Gehazi, this servant of Elisha. I consider he was worse than Achan, because having such a good man as Elisha for a master, you would have thought he would have tried hard to imitate him. But no; he let the covetous feeling grow in his heart, and see what came of it.

I told you that Elisha refused to take

any present of Naaman in return for having cured him of his leprosy, so when Naaman had said good-bye to the prophet and driven away, Gehazi said to himself,—“Although my master has spared this Syrian I will not, but I will run after him, and get something for myself,”

So Gehazi followed after Naaman, and when Naaman saw him running towards him, he stopped his chariot, got down from it, and went to meet him. Thinking that he must have a message from Elisha, he asked him—“Is all well?”

And Gehazi said, “All is well. My master has sent me to you because two young scholars have just come to his house, and he wants you to give me some money and two changes of clothes for them.”

Naaman was only too pleased to be able to do anything for Elisha, so he ordered two of his servants to take back the clothes and plenty of silver. They did so, and when they were at Elisha’s house, Gehazi took it all from them, and went and hid it out of sight. Then he went in and stood

before his master to wait upon him. Now Elisha knew exactly what had happened without Gehazi telling him, so he said, "Where do you come from, Gehazi?"

"Your servant went no whither," he answered.

You see how one lie leads you to tell another.

Then Elisha said, "I know how you followed up Naaman, and he came from his chariot to meet you. Not only have you sinned by being greedy and covetous, but you may have made Naaman think that I cured his leprosy and wanted a reward for it. Instead of this, you know that I wished him to feel that I was but God's servant, and to God alone is thankfulness due. He must thank Him only for his recovery. The leprosy of Naaman shall be upon you for ever."

He had no sooner said these dreadful words, than all Gehazi's skin turned white and sore, and he had to go away directly from Elisha, for, as I told you in the last chapter, "lepers," that is people who had

leprosy, were obliged to live by themselves.

Now, dears, think of Gehazi, and let his story be a warning to you never to wish for what belongs to others. However, if you should do wrong, confess it, for a lie is just another sin added to the first one, and if even you are not found out, remember that God always knows it, and will be sure to punish *you*, as He did Gehazi for telling lies.

CHAPTER XLV.

HOSHEA, THE LAST KING OF ISRAEL.

2 KINGS xvii.

THE good prophet lived to be a very old man, and during all these years he followed the example of his great master Elijah. His time was spent in teaching the young prophets,—giving good advice to the kings—which I am sorry to tell you, they seldom took—and begging the people to keep true to God. Did the people listen to him? Sad to say, they did not, and when Elisha died, they got worse and worse. As one wicked king passed away, another as bad took his place, and so it went on until at last God resolved to send a severe punish-

ment on all the people in the kingdom of Israel. I must tell you what it was.

Hundreds of miles away from Palestine (or Canaan) was a country called Assyria. The king of Assyria had plenty of soldiers, and he brought numbers of them to fight the king of Israel. The Israelites fought bravely for their king, who was called "Hoshea," and for three years they prevented the king of Assyria from getting into their capital city "Samaria." At last, however, they were conquered. There was no food left for the people to eat, so that they were too weak to fight, and the Assyrians were able to enter Samaria and do what they wished all through the land. They liked the rich land of Canaan, where everything grew so quickly, so they settled themselves down in the different towns, whilst the Israelites were made slaves and carried far away into the distant Assyrian country. Never again did they see their beautiful "land of promise" with its olive trees and vineyards. They had forsaken God and broken His commandments, they

had refused to listen to the voice of the prophets whom he had sent to warn them, and now He had indeed forsaken them.

Was I not right when I told you the punishment was severe? Perhaps you will say, they deserved it, still I hope you are sorry for them, as we ought always to pity the unhappy, even if they are not good. When Moses gave God's law to the people in the Wilderness, he told them that all these troubles would come upon them, if they forgot God and worshipped idols, and God had been very patient and forgiving to His people, but at last even He could forgive no more, and so this sad punishment came. Never leave off loving God, my darlings, or he will have to punish you too.

CHAPTER XLVI.

ATHALIAH, THE WICKED GRANDMOTHER.

2 KINGS xi. 12; 2 CHRONICLES xxi. 22.

THERE are now no more kings of Israel to hear about, but I hope you have not forgotten what I told you happened after Solomon's death, how his son Rehoboam lost a great part of his kingdom. Jero-boam, it was, who took it away from him, and called himself king of Israel, whilst Rehoboam was known as the king of Judah.

Well, now, you heard about some of the wicked kings of Israel, and there were no *good* ones among them. I am glad to say we have finished with them, and I am

going to talk to you about some of the kings of Judah. They were different to the kings of Israel, for some of them were good, although some were very bad.

I wonder which stories you like best, my dear children, those about the good or the bad people? I will not guess, but I rather think I know. Anyhow, now I am going to tell you one of a very bad woman. Her name was Athaliah, and when you hear that her parents were the wicked Ahab and Jezebel, you will not expect to find her good. She was married to one of the kings of Judah, and she led him into all sorts of sin. Altars were raised to the false god Baal, and the true God was almost forgotten. This went on for some years, and then God sent a terrible sickness on the king, and he died. His young son was then made king, and Athaliah, who ought to have helped him to do what was right after his father's sad death, would not take warning, but encouraged him in all the wickedness she could.*

* 2 CHRONICLES xxii., 3.

However, punishment soon came upon the king, for at the end of one year he was killed in battle, and Athaliah was left without husband or children. Still her heart was as wicked and cruel as ever. She was a real daughter of Jezebel, and now, half mad with rage and grief, she determined to be queen of Judah herself, so she gave orders that all her son's family should be killed. Her servants obeyed her cruel commands but too well, all were put to death except one, a little baby boy, Athaliah's grandchild. He was called Joash. And how do you think he was saved? His aunt, Jehosheba, who was the wife of the high priest in the Temple, managed to steal him away with his nurse from his dying brothers. And where do you imagine she hid him? For six years she had him safely with her in the Temple, and very carefully did she and her good husband, the high priest, bring him up, for they were quite determined that presently he should sit on the throne of Judah, instead of his wicked grandmother Athaliah.

During all these six years that she was queen, she would have prayers said to Baal, instead of to God, and Baal's priests offered sacrifices on the altars, for the queen as I told you, was an idolater, like Ahab and Jezebel (her father and mother) had been.

But now all this was to be changed. The little Joash was seven years old, and his uncle, the high priest, thought that the people would now be glad to hear that he had been saved, and would make him king in place of the wicked Athaliah. So one Sabbath day, Jehoida called in first the captains of the guard, and told them the story of how he and his wife had saved the little Joash, when all the rest of his family were murdered. He said that now the time had come for him to be made king. Would they help him and be faithful to the little prince? Yes, they all cried.

Then Joash was brought into the sight of all the people, who had come to the Temple, for there were still many who would not pray to Baal. The high priest now took some of the holy oil, poured it on

the little prince's head, put the crown on him, and all the people clapped their hands and said, "God save the king."

They shouted so loudly that Athaliah heard the noise, and she came into the Temple to see what it meant. Not often did she visit God's holy house, and the sight that met her eyes was not a pleasant one to her.

There, standing by a pillar, was the little king with the royal crown on his head, the princes and royal guard all armed around him, whilst the musicians played hymns of praise, and the people shouted again and again. They were very joyful to find that one of the royal family was alive and going to reign over them instead of Athaliah.

Then Athaliah shouted "Treason! treason!" but no friends came to her help, and the armed men came flocking round her, and would have killed her then and there; but this the high priest would not allow. "Slay her not in the house of the Lord," he said.

So they took her and brought her out by

the king's house, and there she was slain with a sword. Then the crowd of people went into the house of Baal, took down the altars, broke up all the false images, and killed Mattan the high priest of Baal.

As long as Jehoida, the high priest, lived, Joash had always a good friend and adviser, and the young king did all that was right, but after Jehoida's death Joash forsook God, and would not listen to the prophets, who tried to persuade him to return to God, so his end was unhappy ; some of his servants killed him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

HEZEKIAH AND THE KING OF ASSYRIA.

2 KINGS xviii. ; 2 CHRONICLES xxix., xxx.

AFTER Joash, there were several very bad kings of Judah, but at last we come to a very good one, so you shall hear about him.

His name was Hezekiah. Not only did he do all that was right himself, but he talked to the people and persuaded them to be good, and to pray to the true God. Then he made them destroy all the idols, and break down the altars that had been set up to the false gods. Hezekiah lived in Jerusalem where the Temple stood, and it grieved him to see how this beautiful

house of God had been neglected. Every part of it required cleaning, and this was not all, in some places it was broken down. Hezekiah set the Levites to work, and soon all was repaired and fit again for God's service.

Hezekiah then sent letters all through his kingdom, asking the people to come to the Temple and keep the feast of Passover. From all parts Israelites flocked to Jerusalem, for they were pleased to obey their good king's command, and great was the joy of all the assembled multitude, when Hezekiah offered up a prayer to God for pardon for all. God listened to Hezekiah, and forgave the people their sins, then the feast of Passover was kept, not for seven days, but for fourteen. Never had there been such great joy in Jerusalem since the days of King Solomon, when the Temple was first thrown open to the people.

Now, it was in Hezekiah's time that the king of Assyria had come to fight the last king of Israel, and had carried his people away as slaves to the country of Assyria.

When Hezekiah had been king about fourteen years, the king of Assyria—not the same one who had conquered Hoshea, thought he would try and take Judah too for himself. So he got a great many of his soldiers together, and marched them over to Canaan, right up to the city of Jerusalem. Then they took out their tents and settled down in them, determined to fight Hezekiah and his soldiers.

But Hezekiah was not at all afraid of the king of Assyria and his large army. He knew that God would help him, and that Jerusalem would not fall into his hands, as Samaria had into the other Assyrian king's. He encouraged the people, and told them not to fear. "Be strong," he said, "and not afraid of the king of Assyria, for he has only an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight our battles."*

So the people did take courage, and the Assyrian king soon found that it was no

*2 CHRONICLES xxxii. 6, 7.

such easy matter as he had hoped, to get Jerusalem. Then he tried something else.

He sent one of his captains, called Rabshakeh, a very clever man, who could speak the Jews' language, and he stood on the wall of the city, and called out to the people in it, "Hear what the great king, the king of Assyria, says. Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to save you out of my master's hand. Trust not Hezekiah's words, that his God will save you and your city from the king of Assyria. Make friends with *him* and all will be well with you. Have the gods of the other people, with whom my king has fought, saved them? Was Israel delivered from our hands? Why, then, should your God deliver Jerusalem from us?"

When Rabshakeh had finished speaking, not a word did the people answer him, for the king's command was, "Answer him not."

When Hezekiah was told what Rabshakeh had said, he was very grieved, for he

thought to himself, perhaps the people may believe him instead of trusting in God, and he tore his clothes and went into the Temple.

At this time there was a great prophet living in the land of Judah. His name was Isaiah. Hezekiah sent some of his servants to ask him to pray to God for the people. Now, Isaiah knew how Hezekiah loved God, so he sent him this message back. "Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words you have heard, the king of Assyria has blasphemed and insulted Me, I will punish him. He shall return to his own land, and there he shall be killed."

After this, Hezekiah felt comforted. Not so the king of Assyria. He thought he would try what he could do by frightening the king of Judah himself. So he wrote him a very wicked letter; you shall hear what was in it. "Let not the God, in whom you trust, deceive you into thinking that Jerusalem shall not be delivered into my hands. Surely you have heard what I, and the kings of Assyria before me,

have done to other countries, destroying them utterly. Have the gods of these nations delivered them from my fathers?"

When Hezekiah received this letter and read it, he felt very sad; he could not bear that such a reproach should be uttered against the true God, whom he loved so well. He went up into the house of God, and spread the letter out before the Lord; then he prayed in these words:—"Oh! Lord God of Israel, Thou, alone, art God of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made Heaven and earth. Bow down Thine ear and hear these words, which the king has sent to reproach the true God. I know that the Assyrians have destroyed other nations and burned their gods. But they were *no* gods, only the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them. Now, oh! Lord, I beseech Thee save us out of his hand, that all the world may know that Thou art the Lord God, even Thou only."

Then the Lord sent him an answer through the prophet Isaiah, saying,—“I

have heard that which thou hast prayed against the king of Assyria. It is Me that he has blasphemed and reproached. He shall not come into this city, for I will defend it and save it."

That very night, the angel of death, God's messenger, went out into the camp of the Assyrians, just as he did among the Egyptians, and killed thousands and thousands of the Assyrian soldiers. When the rest of the army woke up in the morning, they found, to their horror, numbers of their companions lying dead.

After such a terrible punishment as this, the king of Assyria was only too glad to get away from Jerusalem, and take back to his own country what was left of his fine army. God's words soon came true, for the Assyrian king did not live long, but died in a fearful manner. Two of his own sons killed him, as he was praying in the house of one of his false gods.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS.

2 KINGS xx.

SOME two or three years after the Assyrians had tried to get the country of Judah for themselves, the good King Hezekiah fell ill, and the prophet Isaiah told him, that he must be ready to die.

Hezekiah felt very sad when he received this message ; perhaps he thought to himself that if longer life were granted to him, he would have time to do many good and useful things for his people, whom he loved dearly. So he prayed to God, and God heard his prayer, and cured his sickness, and told him that he should live for fifteen years more.

Dear children, when God thinks of calling any one of you home to Him, He sends no messenger to bid you be ready. No prophet comes to tell you to prepare to die. You have no warning, like King Hezekiah had. Should you be ready to go to Him? God expects us always to be fit for Heaven. Now if you are good, and love Him truly, by keeping His commandments, whenever He calls you away from this earth, you will be fit to die and go to Heaven.

Well, Hezekiah recovered; he had had a dreadful boil. I dare say you know what a painful thing that is. The boil was cured, and Hezekiah was well again. The wonderful news of God's mercy to him got talked about in all countries, and messengers came from different parts to congratulate him on it.

One king, from a country a long way off, called Babylon (try and remember the name), sent letters and a present to Hezekiah. Hezekiah, you will be sorry to hear, got spoilt by all this kind interest that was taken in him. He grew proud and haughty.

He showed the king of Babylon's messengers all his riches and precious things, and forgot how he owed everything to God. So God was displeased with Hezekiah, and sent him Isaiah to tell him He should punish him. In the course of time these very treasures that he had been so proud of, should be carried off as spoil to Babylon, and the people of Judah would be slaves there. When Hezekiah heard the prophet's words, he saw how badly he had behaved, he confessed his sin and humbled himself. He said, "Good is the word of the Lord."

And all the rest of the years that he was king, he tried to do as much good as he could for his people, so they had not been so happy for many many years.

CHAPTER XLIX.

DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE.

2 KINGS xx., xxiv.

WHEN Hezekiah died, his son was made king, and a very bad one he proved, I am sorry to say. So was his son after him. In fact, nearly all the kings after Hezekiah were so wicked, that at last God said He would bring a punishment on the land of Judah.

You remember, I hope, what happened to the last king of Israel? Much the same thing now came to the king of Judah. His name was Zedekiah. He did all that was wicked in the sight of God, and when God sent His prophets to him, instead of listen-

ing to their warning, he mocked and despised them. He did even worse than this, for there was one very good man called Jeremiah, who would speak the truth to Zedekiah, and told him what would happen to him if he went on behaving so wickedly. Zedekiah was very angry with Jeremiah, and tried to make him prophesy something pleasant, and when he found that he would not, he had him thrown into a horrible prison cell, all full of mud. This, you can imagine, only made God more angry with the king, and at last the punishment came.

Now, there was a country a long way from Canaan, or Palestine, as we now call it, named Babylon. You heard of it in the story of Hezekiah's sickness, so I hope you remember it. The king of Babylon's name was Nebuchadnezzar; a very strange one you will say. He marched with a number of his soldiers, right up to Jerusalem, and they encamped all round it.

By "encamping," I mean that they took out their tents, which they had brought with them, and settled down to live in

them until the people inside Jerusalem should get tired of fighting them, and so be obliged to let them come in. This is called "besieging" a place. After a time, all the food in the city gets eaten, and the people inside cannot come out for more, for fear of the soldiers rushing in and taking the city.

So Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers pitched their tents and built "forts" (that is strong places) outside, all round Jerusalem, and the poor Israelites, who, you know, had brought all this trouble on themselves, were left to starve in Jerusalem.

So things went on for two years. At last there was nothing to eat. Every one was dying of hunger, so the Israelites could not keep the Babylonians from coming into the city, for they could not fight any longer.

The king of Babylon was so cruel. He took King Zedekiah's sons and killed them, in their father's sight. Then he had Zedekiah's eyes put out, and chains of brass were fastened on him, and he was carried away a prisoner to Babylon.

But the saddest part of all is to come.

Our beautiful Temple, Solomon's Temple, that had been built with such loving care, and made holy by God's divine presence, Nebuchadnezzar burnt to the ground. He was determined that nothing should be left, that was beautiful, or rich in Jerusalem. He made his soldiers burn the king's palace, and all the nobles' houses. The very walls round Jerusalem were broken down.

And the Israelites themselves—do you not wonder what became of them? Nebuchadnezzar took numbers of them back as slaves to his own country of Babylon. He only left the poor people, the vine-dressers and husbandmen, to take care of and till the land.

All the rich treasures, from the house of God, the gold and silver vessels that were used in sacrificing—the brazen sea where the priests bathed—all that was valuable was taken away as spoil to Babylon.

Is it not sad to read of these things, when we know that none of them would have happened if the Israelites had kept true to God? We should now be living in

our own land, the land of Palestine, with our beautiful Temple, if God's commandments had not been broken over and over again. Try, dear children, to fear God and keep His commandments; that is the only way to win back our own land.

CHAPTER L.

GEDALIAH, THE GOOD GOVERNOR OF
ISRAEL.

2 KINGS xxv. ; JEREMIAH xl., xli.

I TOLD you that Nebuchadnezzar left numbers of the poor people behind in Palestine. Would you not like to know how they got on when Nebuchadnezzar went back to Babylon ?

First of all I will tell you of a very wise thing that the Babylonian king did. Instead of leaving one of his own captains to rule over the Jews, he chose a very good man, a Jew, for this purpose. His name was Gedaliah. He was such an honest, true man, that Nebuchadnezzar knew he could depend on him to keep peace in the

land. Gedaliah was a great friend of Jeremiah the prophet, whom you have already heard of.

Now Nebuchadnezzar, although he was an idolater, had sense enough to see the wisdom and goodness of God's prophets, so he treated Jeremiah kindly, and even left it to him to choose* whether he would remain in Palestine among the poor people, or go to Babylon, where he would no doubt have been looked up to as a great man.

Which do you think Jeremiah decided on doing? Why, to stay in Palestine with his poor brethren. Jeremiah thought he might still talk to them about God, and besides this, he would beg them to be contented, and accept their punishment, as it had come from God.

Gedaliah, the good governor of the land, gave the people just the same advice. He and Jeremiah did all they could to make the people happy. Gedaliah encouraged them to be industrious, and cultivate the land, and everything was going on most

* JEREMIAH xl., 4.

comfortably, when all at once trouble and misery came again to the poor Jews. This was how it happened.

Among the Jews who were living with Gedaliah was a prince called Ishmael. This Ishmael was jealous of Gedaliah's influence over the people, and of the love they had for him, and the wicked resolve came into his head to kill the wise and good Gedaliah.

One of Gedaliah's friends happened to hear that Ishmael intended doing this, so he came quickly to warn Gedaliah of the mischief that was to come, begging at the same time that he would permit him to kill Ishmael, then there would be no danger for his beloved master. But Gedaliah was so noble and true himself, that he refused to believe in such treachery from Ishmael, whom he thought his friend, and he actually invited Ishmael and ten of his companions to a feast at his house.

Here was just the opportunity that the cruel Ishmael was waiting for: After the meal, he and his friends fell upon Gedaliah

and slew him. Not content with this, they afterwards killed all Gedaliah's friends that they could find. Luckily, Jeremiah, the good prophet, was not at the feast, or he too would no doubt have shared the fate of Gedaliah and the others.

As soon as the dreadful news became known, Ishmael ran away to a city a long way off, and although a faithful friend of Gedaliah's followed after him with a number of soldiers to kill him, they could not catch him. He managed to escape.

Gedaliah's death was a sad trouble to the Jews in Palestine, for they wanted some good man always ready to show them what was right. Jeremiah did all that he could to persuade them to go on as they had in Gedaliah's lifetime, but they would not listen to him. The consequence was, that one misfortune after the other came upon them.

Perhaps some of you children may have heard of the "fast of Gedaliah," which is kept once a year (on the 3rd of Tishri) by very religious people. You may not have

known before why it was kept; now you do. Recollect that it is in memory of Gedaliah the good governor of Palestine, who was cruelly murdered by Ishmael through jealousy. Jealousy, as you saw before, in the history of Cain and Abel, is a horrible sin, so beware of it, dear children; fight against it as against an enemy, if you feel it creeping into your young hearts, for if you encourage it to enter there, it will lead you on to other and even worse sins.

CHAPTER LI.

DANIEL AND NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM.

DANIEL i., ii

Now you shall hear something about the Jews living in Babylon, who had been carried captives there by Nebuchadnezzar. This king was not cruel to them by any means; but still they were very unhappy. They pined for their own beautiful land, with its rich olive yards and vineyards. Although they had brought their harps and other musical instruments with them, they had not the heart to play on them.

“How shall we sing the Lord's song in the land of a stranger?”* they said.

* PSALM cxxxvii., 4.

They must have felt like poor caged birds which, you know, do sometimes refuse to be comforted in their gilded cages, and pine away and die. The Jews could not forget their beautiful Jerusalem, with its holy Temple, and they sat down by the rivers of Babylon and wept.* Their harps they hung on the willow trees, that grew by the river banks.

I told you that Nebuchadnezzar was not at all unkind to his captives. On the contrary, he was ready to do anything for the wise and clever men whom he found among them. This Nebuchadnezzar, although he was an idolater, was very sensible in some things; so he thought his people might be taught much that they did not know by the wise and learned Jews.

Now among the captive Jews were four young men, to whom God gave more wisdom and knowledge than to any of the others. Although they were living in a strange land, among idolaters, they would not do anything that was sinful, but de-

* PSALM cxxxvii., 1.

terminated to keep to their religion as strictly as if they had still been in their native country. Will you try to remember their names, if I tell you them ?

First of all comes Daniel. He was the wisest of the four ; for God gave to him the power of interpreting dreams. Do you recollect another captive, to whom God gave the same gift ? Of course you know I mean Joseph. Well, my dear children, Daniel was much happier than Joseph ; for he was not alone in a strange country ; he had three good companions. Their names were, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah ; but the king gave them these other Babylonian ones, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Well, the king soon saw how clever these four young men were. He had them often with him, and whatever difficult or learned things he asked them about, they could always give him a wise and proper answer ; so that Nebuchadnezzar left off asking the Babylonian wise men and magicians about things he did not know himself, and always came to these four wise Jews in-

stead, and God was with them, because they loved Him and followed His commandments.

One night the Babylonian king had a dream, which disturbed his rest, that he could not sleep. So, just like Pharaoh of old, he sent post-haste for all his magicians and wise men. They must tell him what it meant. When they arrived all recollection of the dream had gone; Nebuchadnezzar could remember nothing. The magicians must find out what it was that was troubling him. Poor men! how could they? Only God could make any one able to do such a thing. So they confessed to the king that they could not tell him the meaning, unless he first told them what he had dreamt.

Then Nebuchadnezzar got in a great passion. "How can I tell you my dream, when you know that I have forgotten it? If you will not explain it to me, you shall all die, and your houses shall be pulled down. But if you will set my mind at rest, and tell me all about it, I will give

you handsome presents, and make you great men."

What a mockery! The thing could not be done.

"O king," they said, "there is not a man on earth who can show the king what he wants to know. Only the gods could do it."

Then the king became more angry—quite furious. He said, "Let all the magicians and astrologers (astrologers were people who pretended to find out things through the stars) and wise men in Babylon be slain."

So Daniel and his three friends would have to die with the other wise men; for none dare disobey the king's command. Then Daniel went to Nebuchadnezzar, and asked him to give him a little time, and perhaps he might be able to tell him what he was so impatient to learn.

After this Daniel went to his companions, and they all prayed together to God for the knowledge that would save their lives. God granted this prayer, and in the night made known to Daniel all about the dream. Then

Daniel thanked and blessed the God of heaven* for having given him the knowledge he had asked for.

When morning came, Daniel went to the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, and said, "You will not have to kill the wise men in Babylon. Bring me in before the king, and I will show him the meaning of his dream."

So the captain brought Daniel in haste to Nebuchadnezzar, and said, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will interpret for the king."

The king answered, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen?"

Daniel's words were: "Your wise men and magicians cannot show you the dream. But there is a God in heaven who can make secrets known; for He it is who maketh all things to happen. God hath not shown me the meaning of the dream because I am wiser than other men, but that I may tell it to you."

* DANIEL ii., 19.

Then Daniel told him everything that he had seen in his sleep, and explained it all to him, and great was the king's joy at this. He said, "Your God must be the God of gods, seeing that He made you able to interpret this difficult dream."

Nebuchadnezzar spoke truly when he called it a "difficult dream;" for it would puzzle you to understand, if I were to tell it you even with Daniel's explanation.

Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many rich gifts, and appointed him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of all the governors and wise men in his kingdom.

Daniel was too good and true to forget his old friends because he himself had been made such a great man; so he asked the king's permission to make judges of his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and Nebuchadnezzar let him do as he liked for them; but Daniel was the greatest man in the whole country, and was allowed the honour—which was granted to very few—of sitting in the king's gate.

CHAPTER LII.

THE GOLDEN IMAGE.

DANIEL iii.

YOU remember, of course, that Nebuchadnezzar was an idolater. Well, my dear children, some years after he had his wonderful dream, he thought the people should have a new idol. So an immense image, as high as a house, was made of gold, and set up in the middle of a plain just outside of the city of Babylon. Then all the princes and officers throughout the country were told to come and see this golden image dedicated. It was to be a holiday throughout the land, music of all sorts was to sound forth, and when the people should hear these

sweet tones, they were all to fall down on their knees and pray to the new image that the king was that day dedicating.

“If any one does not fall down and worship, he shall be thrown into a fiery furnace.”

(A furnace, I must tell you, is a sort of immense open oven, filled with flames of fire.)

So spoke the king's herald, or town-crier as we should call him now. When the important day arrived, you may be sure all the people in Babylon took care to follow the king's command. Do you think there were *any* who would dare to disobey it, and so run the chance of being burnt to death for a punishment?

I am sure you will not be at all surprised to hear that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego would not bend the knee to an idol—a huge piece of gold, formed by men's hands. No, they would not utter prayers to any but the true God.

Now there were some people in Babylon who were jealous of these three good men.

It vexed them to see these captive Jews, whom they hated, raised to be governors in the land, and they thought, Here will be a fine opportunity to get them killed. So they went and told Nebuchadnezzar how they had disobeyed his order, and had served some god of their own, instead of the golden image that he had set up.

Then the king was very furious, and ordered these men to be brought before him.

“Is it true,” he said, turning to them, “that you do not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image that I have set up? If the next time you hear the music sound forth, you fall down and worship the golden image, all well; but if not, then you shall be cast into the fiery furnace, and *who* is the God that can save you from my hands?”

The three men answered the king: “Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, the God whom we serve is able even to save us from out of the fire. But if He will not, then still we will not worship your idol.”

When the king heard this bold answer, he grew very angry—his face was dreadful to see, and he called out to his servants, "Let the furnace be made seven times as hot as it generally is."

Then some of his strongest soldiers took Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and bound them with ropes, so that they should have no chance of escaping, and in this manner, with their clothes on, they were thrown into the flaming furnace. It was so frightfully hot, that as the door of it was opened, the flames scorched the men who threw them in, and burnt them to death.

Now you shall see what became of the three good Jews, whom Nebuchadnezzar meant to burn to death. The king thought he would see how they were faring; so he peeped into the furnace, and much astonished was he at the sight which met his eyes. He called to some of his servants, "Was it three men that we bound and threw into the fire?"

"True, oh king," they answered.

"Then I see four men, unbound, walking

about in the flames, and they are not hurt. The fourth looks like an angel."

I need not tell you, my darlings, what this fourth figure meant, as, surely, you can tell me? It *was* an angel. God had sent His messenger, not so much to help the prisoners as to show the heathen king how He guarded those who trusted the true God.

Then Nebuchadnezzar went to the door of the furnace, and called out to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, "Ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come to me."

So the three men walked out from the midst of the fire. And all the princes, and captains, and servants of the king saw these three Jews that the fire had not touched them. There was not a hair of their heads singed, nor any of their clothes changed, and they did not even smell of the fire.

Nebuchadnezzar, idolater though he was, felt how mighty must be the God who could work such miracles, and he was

honest enough to own it before all the crowd that had gathered round him. He said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent His angel to save His servants, who trusted in Him. Any person who shall utter a word against the God of these Jews shall be cut to pieces and his house pulled down; for there is no other god who could deliver like this."

Then the king was very kind to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and made them great officers in Babylon.

Now, dear children, I wonder whether you think that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they were thrown into the fiery furnace, felt sorry that they had not done like the rest of the people in Babylon, and bowed down to the golden idol? No, no, they were perfectly happy. They knew that they had done right, and perhaps God would save them; though even if He should think it well for them to die, they had no fear; for they knew they would go to heaven.

Will *you* try and follow these brave men's example? Never mind what you see other people doing. If you know that it is wrong, be sure you do not copy it. If you happen to be among disobedient children, you can still be obedient, or if, when you are old enough to be at school, your little companions there are disrespectful to their teachers, or dishonest with their lessons, let their faults be a warning to you. Be brave. Do not mind if they laugh at you for trying to be better than they. I dare say you will feel uncomfortable; but remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and just as God loved and took care of them, so will He, even to you, a little child, show love, and guard you from all harm.

CHAPTER LIII.

PRIDE AND ITS PUNISHMENT.

DANIEL iv.

I DARE say, as you have heard so much about Nebuchadnezzar, you feel a little interest in him, and would not object to my telling you how he went on after the wonderful things that you read of in the last chapter.

Well, my dear children, he fell into a very common sin. He was, as you know, a rich and mighty king. He grew proud and haughty; so that God resolved to show him how weak and powerless he really was; and by what means do you think God did this?

Quite suddenly, one day, his senses left him, and he became like a beast of the field. He ate grass, like an ox; his body was covered with long hairs, like the fur of an animal; he was driven out from among men; so that he had to live in the fields, where his body was wet with the dew of heaven, and his nails grew like birds' claws.

All this had the wise Daniel foretold from a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had dreamt one night.

For seven long, dreary years the king of mighty Babylon remained in this terrible state. From being the honoured king of an immense empire, he was brought down to the same low condition as the beasts of the field. Then God took pity on him, his reason returned, and with it a humble spirit; so that he blessed and thanked God for having taught him what was right. His princes and people were glad to have him back again among them, and he lived happily until the time came for God to call him away from earth.

You little children can learn a lesson from the great and mighty king, Nebuchadnezzar. Never let pride and vanity take hold of you. Never think yourselves better than your companions. If you are above them in any way, if you are cleverer or prettier, remember that you were not your own maker. God, for a wise purpose, made you different to them, and to be proud and vain of this is not only ungrateful, but foolish. Be modest, and, if you have the power, determine to use the gifts bestowed on you for the good of others, just as God freely showers His blessings on us His creatures.

CHAPTER LIV.

DANIEL AND THE HANDWRITING.

DANIEL v.

WHEN Nebuchadnezzar died, his son Belshazzar was made king. He was not at all a good man. All he thought of was feasting and drinking. As for the true God, he never gave a thought to Him; but prayed to idols made of gold and silver, and brass, or even wood and stone.

One day he had invited a number of princes to a feast. In the middle of it he ordered his servants to bring the gold and silver vessels, that his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had carried away from the Temple at Jerusalem, that he and his wicked friends might drink wine from them. You know how wrong this was; for they

were holy, they had been made to use only in God's service. But Belshazzar did not care ; so the vessels were brought, and at the very moment that they were drinking wine out of them, and praising their false gods, a man's hand appeared on the wall, and the fingers wrote certain words there.

How frightened Belshazzar and his guests were ! What did it mean ? Even the words they could not read. The king trembled with fear, and sent in all haste for the wise men and magicians to explain the mystery. "Whoever can read this writing, and tell me the meaning of it," he said, "shall be clothed in the royal scarlet, have a gold chain round his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

So all the king's wise men came hurrying in ; but they were as puzzled as Belshazzar himself. They could not read it, much less interpret the meaning to the king. Then Belshazzar was more troubled than ever. Now the queen had heard of her lord's distress, and at this moment entered the banquet house (that is the room where the

feasts were given). She said, "O king, do not look so sad. There is a man in the kingdom who your father, Nebuchadnezzar, said was wiser than any of the others. He made him the lord of all the magicians and wise men in Babylon. He could always interpret dreams, and explain the hardest things. Daniel is his name. Let him be fetched, and he will soon make the king's mind easy."

So Daniel was brought in before the troubled Belshazzar.

"Are you that Daniel, whom my father brought away from Judah with the other captives? I have heard of you, that the spirit of the gods is with you, that you are wiser than other men. And now, none of the wise men of Babylon can read me this writing on the wall, nor explain it to me. But I hear that you can interpret anything. If *you* can read it and make known the meaning to me, you shall wear the royal scarlet, have a gold chain round your neck, and be third ruler in the kingdom."

Then Daniel answered, "I do not want

your gifts nor any reward, yet will I read the writing, and give you the interpretation of it. My God, the most high God, He made your father, Nebuchadnezzar, a great king over many nations; but when his heart was lifted up, and he grew proud, then God took from him his throne and his glory. He was driven from among men; he grew like the beasts, and was no better than they, until he knew that the true God is the King of all kingdoms, and can do anything that He wishes. But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. You have lifted yourself up against the God of heaven. You have dared to drink wine out of the holy vessels that were made only to use in His service, and have praised the gods of silver and gold, wood and stone, which can neither see, nor hear, nor know anything. Therefore has God sent this hand to write the message on the wall. Here are the words, and this is the meaning:—

“MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.”

“God has tried you and found you wanting, so your kingdom will be taken away from you, and given to the king of another country.”

Belshazzar must have felt very wretched when he heard Daniel's words, for he knew that they were all true, but he kept his word and ordered his servants to dress Daniel in scarlet robes, to put the gold chain round his neck, and the crier went out in the city, telling all the people that Daniel was to be third ruler in the city.

That very night the writing on the wall came true. Darius, the king of a country near Babylon, came up with a large army of soldiers, who fought against the people in Babylon. Belshazzar was killed, and Darius took his country for himself.

CHAPTER LV.

DANIEL AND THE DEN OF LIONS.

DANIEL vi.

YOU have now had several stories about the Jews whilst they were in captivity in Babylon. Things had changed a little for them. They were still in a strange land far away from their own dear land of Israel, but now they had a new master. Instead of the king of Babylon, it was the king of Persia. Perhaps some of you have already guessed how this came about? I told you in the last chapter that Belshazzar, the king of Babylon, was killed by another king called Darius. Well, this Darius ruled over the country of Persia. So now you can under-

stand, I hope, that the Jews in their captivity had now a Persian instead of a Babylonian ruler.

The change of masters made no difference to Daniel. He was very happy with the new king. Darius was an idolater, but for all that he saw how wise and good Daniel was, so everything was trusted to him, and he was made governor over all the princes and judges of the land. This made some of them very jealous of Daniel, so they set themselves to watch him, hoping that they would find out some fault or dishonesty on his part. But this they could not. Daniel was as faithful as he was wise. Just as Joseph was with Pharaoh so was Daniel with Darius. Everything was in his hands, and he could safely be trusted. His enemies must think of some other plan by which they could ruin him.

Now Darius had one great fault, and this his lords knew. He was vain, and loved praise, or "flattery," as I should call it. So Daniel's enemies came to Darius and said: "We have been thinking what a wise law

it would be that if any one should pray to, or ask any favour, for thirty days, of any god or man—except of thee, O king!—he should be thrown into the den of lions. We have it already written down, and now, O king! if thou wilt sign it, no one shall dare change it, for the laws of the Persians can never be altered.”

Darius's vanity was well pleased by his false, flattering lords; the writing was signed with the king's name, and it was the law of the land; not even the king himself could alter it. He had not given a thought to his well-beloved servant Daniel, of how he prayed to his God every day, or he would never have allowed such a law to be made, for Darius was much too fond of Daniel to hurt him in any way, but you see he acted without stopping to think well first, and gave way to his pride.

So all went well for the cunning enemies of the pious Daniel. Every day, at three different times, this good man fell on his knees, and before the open window prayed to the true God. Shall I tell you why he

chose the open window to pray at? His window looked towards Jerusalem, and although the holy city was much too far off for Daniel to see it, he liked to think that he was praying towards the place where the beautiful Temple had stood, which had often been filled with the cloud of God's glory.

Now you understand what, I dare say, seemed strange to you—Daniel's praying at the open window—for you and I would always choose the quietest part of the room to say our prayers in.

Well, Daniel soon heard of the new law that had been made. Do you think he still went on praying as before, or would he say no prayers until the thirty days were over?

My dear children, Daniel loved God too well to do this. So every day, at his open window, just the same as before, Daniel was to be seen kneeling down and praising the true God. His envious enemies lost no time in going to the king, asking, "Did you not sign a law that if any one prayed, or

asked a petition of any god or man during these thirty days, he should be thrown into the lions' den?"

"It is true," answered Darius.

Then said they, "That Daniel, who was brought from Jerusalem with the other captives, pays no attention to your word, nor the law that you have signed. Three times a day he prays to his God."

When the king heard this, he was very vexed with himself for having allowed such a law to be made, and he tried to think of some means by which he could save Daniel. Until the sun set, his thoughts were busy for him. Then the men who hated Daniel because he was so good, came again to the king, and reminded him that nothing could change a law which had once been made. So there was no help. Sorely against his will, and grieved at heart, Darius gave the order, and Daniel was brought out and thrown down into the den of hungry, fierce lions. (A den, I must tell you, is a sort of pit dug out under the ground, where wild animals are kept. Perhaps some of you

have seen the bears' pit at the Zoological Gardens?)

Now the Persian king was an idolater, and worshipped the sun and many things stranger than *that*, for after all you will tell me that the sun is a very glorious thing, and God's work. Still Darius knew that Daniel's God was a very wonderful one, for had he not heard how Daniel's three companions had been delivered by Him from the fiery furnace into which they had been flung by Nebuchadnezzar. So you will see from the king's words to Daniel, just as he was being thrown into the den, that he hoped and half believed in fact that his great God might save him. "Thy God, whom thou servest, He will deliver thee."*

Then a stone was brought and laid on the top of the den where the opening was, and the king sealed it with his own and also with his lords' seal. Do you know Darius's reason for doing this? He used his own ring to seal with, that he might guard against Daniel's enemies interfering with the

*DANIEL vi., 16.

den during the night, and his lords' was used that they might see that he himself took no step to help Daniel. He left it all in God's hands.

When this was done, the king went home to his palace with a sad and heavy heart; he would not eat anything, nor would he allow the musicians to try and amuse him; he could think of nothing else but his poor Daniel. He could not sleep, for he was too angry with himself for having listened to the voice of vanity; his conscience told him it was this that had made him forget his trusty adviser.

Very early in the morning he rose from his bed and went in haste to the den of lions. When he came to it he called out in a sad voice to Daniel, scarcely daring to hope for an answer, for would not Daniel by this time have been torn to pieces and eaten up by these savage animals? "O Daniel," cried the king, "servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest, able to deliver thee from the lions?"

Daniel's God—our God—you know can

do anything. *Nothing* is too hard for Him. So Daniel at once heard the king's words, and answered, "O king, live for ever. My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me, for I was innocent in His eyes, neither have I done thee any harm, O king."

Then Darius was exceedingly glad, and called to some of his servants to pull away the stone from the top of the den, and take out Daniel. Daniel was brought up out of the pit, and not even a scratch was found upon him, nor were any of his clothes torn. Daniel had believed in God, so God had been with him. The lions, the fiercest of all the beasts, had not touched Daniel; he had been as safe in their den as he would have been in his own chamber praying.

You will be sorry to hear of the next thing that Darius did, but I do not like telling you one part of the story and leaving out another. He commanded that those men who had accused, that was, told tales of Daniel, should, with their wives and children, be thrown into the same den that

Daniel had been saved from. This was done, and before they were at the bottom of the den, the lions had rushed at them and broken all their bones in pieces. This was very cruel of Darius; he ought not to have done anything to the poor innocent women and children, but I am sorry to say people *were* very cruel in the times I am telling you of. Kings could do much more as they liked with their people, than kings and queens can in our days, so no doubt you will agree with me that things are better managed now than they were then.

After this Darius so believed that Daniel's God was the one God who ought to be praised, that he wrote letters and sent them out all through the different countries of his large kingdom, saying that there was no god like Daniel's God, and that every one must fear Him, for He had saved Daniel even from the power of the fierce lions.

The black days had now passed for Daniel. All the rest of his life he lived happily with the Persian king, giving him

wise advice, still not forgetting his own countrymen, the Jews. He foretold to them many things that would happen in the years to come, for Daniel was one of our greatest prophets.

I wonder if any of you have noticed that lately, instead of talking of the "*children of Israel*," I have always said, "*the Jews*?" I have done so on purpose. Do you remember how I told you that in the time of Hoshea, the last king of Israel, the king of Assyria fought against him, and took away all his people as slaves? Well, they never came back to the land of Israel, or Palestine, as we now call it, so the small number who were left behind, I mean the people in the kingdom of Judah, got to be called Jehudahites or *Jews*, the name that we are known by to this very day.

CHAPTER LVI.

RETURN OF THE JEWS; THE TEMPLE REBUILT.

EZRA i., 3 ; NEHEMIAH viii.

Do you think the Jews were always to remain exiles in Babylon? No, my dear children. God had said that they should be there for some time as a punishment for their sins, and the great prophet Jeremiah had told them that this would last over seventy years.

Well, the seventy years had passed. Then God put it in the heart of the king Cyrus, who was then their ruler, that they might return to their own land. He said to the Jews, "Whoever among you wishes to go up to Jerusalem, and build the house of his God, let him go."

This was very kind of Cyrus, as he was an idolater; but he did even more. He gave back to the people all the holy gold and silver vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away for spoil, when he destroyed the Temple. Besides this the Babylonians and Persians gave the Jews presents of all sorts. It reminds me a little of what happened when the children of Israel left Egypt; does it you, my dears? Only now there was no Moses sent by God to lead the people. So they had gifts of silver and gold, and all sorts of things that would be wanted in the work of rebuilding. Perhaps the most useful presents of all were the camels and mules they gave the poor Jews, as without these they could never have travelled so far, nor carried half the precious things which had been given them.

Perhaps you have no idea what a very long journey it was from Babylon to Jerusalem. It would take them months to reach the holy city; for, remember, there were no railroads then for them to travel by, as we have now-a-days.

But how glad the Jews were when they heard the good news—all who wished to return and live in Palestine might do so; and a goodly number gathered themselves together from out of the different cities and prepared to start. Some of course there were, too lazy or too indifferent, who stayed behind, or, perhaps, they had not the courage to face the weary, tiresome journey before them.

And now the long march began. After some months Jerusalem was reached. Oh, how different it was to the beautiful city some of them had once lived in. I say *some* of them, because you must know that during the seventy years' captivity many of the old people had died, and also many had been born; so these young ones knew nothing of the old Jerusalem except what their parents had told them; and we may be sure the old loved city was often and often spoken of by the captives.*

But now the old Jerusalem was no more. Ruins everywhere; not only was the Temple

* LAMENTATIONS i., 7.

gone, but all the houses and palaces were burnt, and the very walls of the city broken down. How dreary it all looked! But the Jews had not come back to mourn; they would not waste their time. They meant to rebuild the Temple and the city; so they set to hard work at once. First, the ruins were cleared away, and soon an altar was set up, upon which the priests laid burnt offerings to the Lord, and the foundations of God's house were once again laid. When this was done, the people all sang together and praised God, thanking Him for His mercy in bringing them back once more to their own land. But even now it was not all joy. Many of the old men and priests wept sad tears as they thought to themselves of the magnificent first Temple, and how different this second one would be. But their cries were scarcely heard; the shouts of joy from the young were louder than the sounds of weeping from the old men.

So the Temple was being rebuilt; but it took a great many years, and was very

hard work. It was not the same as in Solomon's time, when all the strange people round Palestine were friendly with the Jews, and helped them to get all they wanted for the work. *Now* the poor Jews had many enemies who tried to hinder them in their labours, and sometimes they had to stay and fight when they ought to have been getting on with the building.

You can fancy how difficult it was when I tell you that at times the men who were building the walls of the city had to carry a sword, or some other weapon, in one hand, whilst they used a tool with the other.*

Still, with all these hardships to fight against, after a time all was finished. The Temple was rebuilt; but God's glory, His cloud, the divine presence, or "Shechina," as we call it, never again filled the House as in olden time. Then, again, the Ark of the Covenant, with its beautiful mercy-seat that I told you of, which held the tables of stone and Aaron's rod, was gone—lost to

Israel since the cruel Nebuchadnezzar had burnt the Temple.

Still the people might have been very happy, if they had only followed God's word and kept His commandments; for there were many good men who talked to them and tried to make them do right. Will you see if you can remember the names of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, as these three did a great deal to keep up the people's courage, whilst the hard work of building was going on? Afterwards, like Moses and some of the prophets you have heard of, they talked boldly to the people of their sins, and begged them to try and put them all away, and be true servants of God. And Ezra stood on a raised wooden platform, that all the people might see him, whilst he read to them from the book of the Law, and explained it to the people. Numbers of men and women and children came every day to listen to the holy words; for all the while they had been in captivity they had not been allowed to read the Torah, or Law.

Then Ezra blessed the Lord, and all the people said, Amen.

CHAPTER LVII.

AHASUERUS AND VASHTI.

ESTHER i.

Now, dear children, I will tell you the story of the good Queen Esther. Perhaps some of you, who look out anxiously for Purim each year, know it already; if so, I am sure it must be such a favourite, that you will not mind hearing it again.

I told you the other day that not all the Jews went back to their own land. There were really a great many who stayed behind in Babylon, and the different cities of Persia; so this story will be about some of them.

The king of Persia at this time was Ahasuerus, or Xerxes as he is called in other books (or histories as we should call them,) that tell us of him. Perhaps some of you elder ones will be ready to say, "Oh, yes, we have heard of him. He fought against the Greeks; but they were very brave, and he got the worst of it, and was very glad to return to his own country." Well, this Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, lived at a city called Shushan, or Susa. Shushan was the capital of Persia. There he had a magnificent palace; for he was a very rich and mighty king. He ruled over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces. However, he did not make at all a good use of his riches and power. He was vain and haughty; so that nothing pleased him better than showing off all the grand things he had.

When he had been king three years, he made a great feast to all his princes and servants, just to show them how rich he was, and the grandeur of his palace. The floors of this palace were of different coloured marbles, and the curtains were hung by silver rings

to marble pillars, and all the beds were made of gold. The guests drank their wine from golden cups, and the choicest and daintiest food was set before them. Whilst this feast was going on in the palace gardens, Vashti, the queen, gave a feast to the ladies in the royal house; for in Eastern countries like Persia, it was not the fashion for the men and women to eat together.

On the seventh day, when the king and his friends had all been drinking a great deal of wine, and I dare say were none the better for it, it suddenly entered into Ahasuerus' head that Queen Vashti should be brought with her royal crown on her head, that all the people and princes might see what a beautiful wife he had; for she was very fair to look on. So some of the royal chamberlains (the chamberlains were those who waited on the king in his bed-chamber) were sent to fetch her.

But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command. And quite right, I think, she was. No modest woman would care to be brought among a number of half-intoxi-

cated men, that they might stare at her beauty. Then the king was very angry that she should dare disobey *him*, the mighty King of Persia, whom all were ready to flatter, and he turned to his wise men, who knew the laws of the land, and said, "What shall be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not obeyed the command of the king, which he sent her by his chamberlain?"

One of the princes, named Memucan, who sat near Ahasuerus, answered, "Not only has Queen Vashti done wrong to the king, but to all the princes and people throughout his kingdom. If other women shall get to hear of what she has done, they too will disobey their husbands. Let the king make it a law of the Medes and Persians, so that it can not be altered, that Queen Vashti comes no more before King Ahasuerus, and let the king make some one else queen in her place."

Nothing could have been proposed that would have pleased the king better. He was delighted. You see what a tyrant he was, rather different to the generous king

Cyrus, who had sent the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

A law was at once made, saying that Vashti should no longer be queen, and that all wives were to obey their husbands.

CHAPTER LIX.

ESTHER, THE NEW QUEEN.

ESTHER ii.

SOME time after all I have just told you had happened, when King Ahasuerus' anger had cooled down a little, and he could talk quietly of what Vashti had done, some of his servants said to him, "Why do you not have another queen in the place of Vashti? Let the king's officers go through the provinces of his kingdom, and look out for the most beautiful maidens. Then they can be brought together to the palace at Shushan, to the house where the women live, and Hege, the keeper of the women, will take charge of them. And let the maiden that pleaseth the king best be made queen instead of Vashti."

This idea pleased the tyrant, and he said, "We will have it so."

What a strange manner of choosing a wife, you of course think, my dear children. To be fair of face was all that was asked for. I am sorry to tell you, that even now in Eastern countries, Turkey and Persia for instance, wives are selected in the same way; beautiful girls get the richest husbands; the men do not think of asking if they are good or clever. Now, in Shushan there lived a certain Jew named Mordecai. He was one of those who had been carried away captive from the land of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. He had a cousin called Esther, whom he had brought up like his own child; for she was an orphan. She had neither father nor mother. She was fair and graceful; so when the king's officers saw her, she was at once taken to Hege, who, I told you, had the care of the women's house in the palace, and was placed among the other girls, from whom Ahasuerus was to choose his queen.

Esther had not only a pretty face, but

she had also a sweet gracious way of speaking that gave pleasure to all who came near her, and she soon became a favourite with the chamberlain Hege. No one knew that Esther was a Jewess; for Mordecai had told her to say nothing about her religion for the present. He loved her very dearly; so you can imagine how great was his anxiety to know if she would please the king, when it should be her turn to see Ahasuerus, and she had to wait some time for this.

Every day the loving Mordecai called at the women's house to enquire after Esther. At last, one day, what news do you think he heard? Why, that the king had been so delighted with Esther, that he had chosen her from all the other women, had set the royal crown on her head, and had made her queen in Vashti's place. Then Ahasuerus gave a grand feast to all his princes and servants, and called it Esther's feast, in honour of his new queen, and sent presents to many of his people all through his kingdom.

Still Esther said not a word about her religion or her relations; for although she was now a queen, she obeyed Mordecai just the same as when she was a child brought up by him.

And Mordecai? He would not push himself forward and say he was the queen's cousin; but he came frequently to the palace, and sat by the king's gate, so that he could hear of all that was going on, and could easily send letters or messages to Esther.

One day, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, he heard that two of the king's chamberlains were angry at something which Ahasuerus had done, and meant to try and kill the king. This we call "conspiring" against the king. Mordecai at once told this to Esther, and she went to Ahasuerus with the news, letting him know that it was Mordecai who had found it out.

I want you to notice this little fact. Esther might have gone to her lord and just told him that these two men were going to try and kill him, making sure that

he would reward her for the timely warning. But she was too honest to take praise to herself that belonged to another, and so you see that was why she was careful to let the king know that it was Mordecai who had found it all out and sent to tell her.

The matter was looked into, and it was found to be just as Mordecai said. So the two chamberlains were both hanged, and it was all written down in the "Book of the Chronicles" before the king. This book was a history of all that happened, for everything worth remembering was written down in it.

CHAPTER LIX.

HAMAN, THE ENEMY OF THE JEWS.

ESTHER iii.

Now, amongst the lords at Ahasuerus' court was a man called Haman. He was not a Persian, but an Agagite, that is an Amalekite. Agag,* I hope you remember, was the last king of that people, and was killed by the prophet Samuel, when Saul disobeyed God and saved him alive.

This Haman was a very bad man—proud, haughty, cruel, and jealous. However, he managed to please the king. Perhaps he always flattered him, and I told you that Ahasuerus was a regular tyrant, who would have everything his own way, and dearly

* 1 SAMUEL xv., 8.

loved flattery. So Haman was made the first man at court, his seat in the palace being nearest to the king, and raised higher than that of any of the princes there. All the king's servants bowed down and made obeisance to Haman when he came in sight, for so the king had ordered.

There was one man who never bowed his knee nor made obeisance before Haman. *You* can tell me who this was? Mordecai, of course. To the king he knew that it was his duty to pay respect. It is one of the laws of our religion to reverence our king or queen; but why should he bow before a bad man, just because he was rich and powerful? No, Mordecai would not do it, and you think it could matter little to the great man Haman, "the king's favourite," if one poor captive did, or did not pay him reverence. But you are mistaken.

When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow, nor show him any mark of respect he was very angry. He soon found out that he was a Jew, and little thinking that

Esther, the king's darling, belonged also to that despised nation, a wicked plan entered his head. You will see how revengeful and cruel Haman must have been, when I tell you it. He meant to try and get permission from the king not to kill Mordecai alone, but all his nation. Whatever Jews there were in Persia, they should all be slain, just because this one Jew, this Mordecai, refused to bow down before him.

Have you ever heard of a more horrible thing? Then see how deceitful and cunning Haman was. He did not go to Ahasuerus and say the truth, "There is a man, a Jew, who has annoyed me; may I kill him and all his people?" but this is what he said: "There is a people scattered about in the different cities of your country; they have their own laws, and do not keep yours; so that it is against your interest to have them living in your kingdom. Let letters be written to say they are to be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand pieces of money to the king's treasurers for him."

A "treasurer" is a person who has to

take care of money that belongs to someone else.

The king was too lazy and selfish to enquire into the matter, besides, he did not value the lives of these strange people. Haman seemed to wish it, and Ahasuerus was very glad he could do him a favour with so little trouble to himself. He did not even want the money. All he did was to take the ring from off his finger, and give it to Haman to sign the letters he wanted written; for with the king's seal to them none dare disobey the writing. He said, "Do whatever you like with the people; they are yours; and as for the money, keep it, I do not want it."

So Haman, "the Jews' enemy,"* was to have it all his own way.

Then Haman set the king's servants to work, writing letters to send out all over the kingdom, saying that on a certain day, for which he had cast lots, the thirteenth of Adar, all the Jews were to be killed. Men, women, and even little children, all were

* ESTHER iii., 10.

HAMAN, THE ENEMY OF THE JEWS.

to die, and everything that belonged to them was to be seized and taken as a reward for those who helped kill them.

These letters were signed with the seal on the king's ring, which you remember Ahasuerus gave to Haman to use ; and the postmen were hurried off to carry these cruel orders into every part of the country.

And now when Haman had begun his work of revenge on Mordecai, he could again feel happy, and he went into the palace and drank wine with the king.

But in the city of Shushan, where a great many Jews lived, there was weeping and wonder ; for they could not understand why this dreadful trouble had come upon them.

CHAPTER LX.

MORDECAI'S FAITH.

ESTHER iv.

Now when Mordecai came to hear of all that was going on, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went forth into the midst of the city, crying out with a loud and bitter cry, until he reached the king's gate. Beyond this he might not go; for none who were clothed in sackcloth and ashes might enter here. Only the happy and gay dared present themselves before the king. He would not trouble himself with those who were sad; was he not the king? *He* only lived to enjoy himself; so Mordecai, in the garments of sorrow, must remain outside the gate.

Mordecai was not the only one who had put on sackcloth and ashes. Everywhere that the dreadful news came, all through the different cities, where the king's command was made known, there was great mourning among the Jews, and weeping and wailing. Many refused to eat; they fasted and laid themselves down on the ground in sackcloth and ashes.

By-and-bye, some of Esther's maids and chamberlains came and told her that Mordecai was in great trouble. They little guessed how deeply interested she was in the news; for no one had any idea of her being a Jewess, and above all, a relation of Mordecai. Esther was very grieved, although she did not yet know *why* Mordecai had clothed himself in his sad garments. She sent him some handsome clothes, and begged him to put off the sackcloth. But he would not receive them from her.

Then Esther sent a second time to tell Mordecai he must let her know the cause of his sadness. So the chamberlain came

to Mordecai into the street of the city, which was before the king's gate.

Mordecai told him all that had happened, even to the sum of money which Haman had promised to pay when the Jews were all destroyed. He also sent to Esther a copy of the letters ordering the people to kill the Jews, and he told her that she must go before the king and entreat him to save her people.

So Hatach, the chamberlain, came back and told Esther Mordecai's words. Then Esther sent him this message: "You know there is a law, that if anyone, man or woman, goes before the king without his sending for them, they will be put to death, unless the king should hold up the golden sceptre, which he carries in his hand. I have not yet been sent for to come to the king the last thirty days."

When Mordecai heard Esther's words, he told Hatach to say: "Think not that you will escape because you are in the king's house, any more than all the Jews. But if you are afraid to speak, then God will send

us deliverance in some other way ; but you will die. Who knows but that you have been made queen, just to save your people?"

See what faith Mordecai had. His courage gave Esther hope ; she would risk all, her life even, to try and save her people ; so she sent Mordecai this answer : " You go and gather together all the Jews that are in Shushan. Let them fast and pray for me for three days, and I with my maidens will do the same. After this I will go to the king, although it is against the law ; and if I must die, I will die."

So Mordecai did as Esther commanded.

CHAPTER LXI.

ESTHER'S PETITION.

ESTHER V.

FOR three days all the Jews who were in Shushan fasted and prayed. On the third day, Esther put on her royal garments to go before the king.

Ahasuerus was sitting on his throne by the gate of the royal house, when he looked up and saw his beautiful wife standing outside in the court. The sight of her pleased him, and he at once lifted up the golden sceptre that was in his hand. How delighted Esther was to see this. God had listened to her prayers, and now she thought all would be well; for the sceptre being raised meant that she was to come forward

to the king. She did so, and touched the top of the sceptre. Then Ahasuerus said to her, "What wilt thou, Queen Esther? and what is thy request? It shall be given thee, even if it be half the kingdom."

See how fond Ahasuerus was of her. There was nothing he would refuse her. Esther said, "If it seem good to the king, let the king and Haman come this day to the feast that I have prepared for him."

Now I dare say the king was rather surprised to find what a little thing Esther had come to ask of him; but you see she had to be careful how she went to work. The enemy of her people was a cruel, cunning man, or it may be that at the last moment her courage failed, and she dared not yet entreat the king for the lives of her people and herself. As yet she would only invite her royal husband and his favourite to the banquet at her palace. The king accepted her invitation, and said to some of his servants, "Tell Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther has said."

So the king and Haman came to the

banquet that Esther had prepared. Whilst they were at the feast, drinking the royal wine, again the loving king asked Esther, "What is thy petition? and it shall be granted, and what is thy request? If it is even half the kingdom, it shall be given thee."

Poor Esther! She was not sure the time had yet come to make her real petition; so she answered, "My petition and my request is, if I have found favour in the sight of the king, let the king and Haman come again to-morrow to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and then I will tell the king what my request is."

So it was arranged. The next day Ahasuerus and Haman were again to be Esther's guests, and then she would make known what her petition was.

Haman went forth from the palace that day joyful and with a glad heart. Here were indeed fresh honours for him. The beautiful Esther, the beloved of his master, had chosen him specially to invite twice to her feast. But when Haman came out of the palace and saw Mordecai sitting

in the king's gate, that he did not stand up, nor bow before him, all the joy went out of his heart, and angry feelings took its place. However, he said nothing to Mordecai, but went straight home to his own house. When there, he sent for his wife Zeresh, and his friends, and told them how rich he was, and how the king had raised him above all the princes and servants at court. "Yea, even Esther, the queen, asked me to come with the king to-day to the banquet she had prepared, although there was no other man there, and she has invited me to come again to-morrow with the king. But all this does me no good so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting in the king's gate."

Now, was he not a wicked, greedy man? I am sorry to say his wife and all his friends must have been as bad; for they did not try to persuade him to forgive Mordecai not paying him respect. Instead of this, they said, "Have a gallows made fifty cubits * high, and to-morrow ask the king

* A cubit is a foot and three-quarters.

to let Mordecai be hanged on it. Then you can go in merrily with the king to the feast."

This was just the thing to please the cruel Haman; so they put up the gallows.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE BOOK OF THE CHRONICLES.

ESTHER vi.

Now I told you that when Haman returned from Esther's feast he had a high gallows put up on which to hang Mordecai. On the night of that very day, Ahasuerus, the king, could not sleep. Of course, something must be done to while away the time for him. He thought he would like some one to read to him; so his servants were ordered to bring the Book of the Chronicles, where, as I told you, everything that happened worth remembering was written down.

By chance, as it seemed to them, but by

God's directing, as I should say, the part they read about was the story of how two of the king's chamberlains had tried to kill him. The king asked, "What has been done to Mordecai as a reward for telling us of this?"

"Nothing," replied his servants.

Then Ahasuerus said, "Who is in the court?"

The court, you must know, was a sort of broad open passage, running round the palace. Now, who should be in the outside court but Haman. He had come to get permission from the king to have Mordecai hanged on the gallows, that had just been set up for him. So the king's servants said, "Haman is in the court."

"Let him come in," were the king's words.

When Haman had entered the royal chamber, Ahasuerus said, "What shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour?"

Now Haman thought to himself, to whom

would the king delight to show honour more than to me ? so he said, " For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, let the royal garments be brought which the king usually wears, the horse which the king rides upon, and the royal crown which is set upon his head. Then let all these things be given into the hands of one of the king's most noble princes. Let him put them on the man whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, calling before him, ' Thus shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.' "

Then Ahasuerus said to Haman, " Make haste and do all that you have just said to Mordecai, the Jew, who sits in the king's gate. Let nothing fail of all that you have spoken."

Can you imagine how Haman felt ? Think of his rage and disappointment at having to do all this for his enemy, and yet he dared not say a word. To disobey the haughty tyrant would mean death.

So Haman had no choice but to take the horse, and the royal garments, dress Mordecai in them, and bring him on horseback through the city, crying out, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

When this was over, Mordecai came again to the king's gate, whilst Haman hurried home furious and disheartened. He told Zeresh, his wife, and all his friends everything that had happened. Cruel people are always cowards, so they were very frightened, and said to Haman, "Now that you have begun to fall before this Mordecai, who is a Jew, you will not succeed against him, but he will overcome you."

Whilst they were still talking about it, the king's chamberlains came to fetch Haman, as it was time to go to Esther's feast, which you shall hear about in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LXIII.

ESTHER SAVES HER PEOPLE.

ESTHER vii.

So Ahasuerus and Haman came to feast with Esther, the queen. And the king said to Esther again, on this the second day of the banquet, "What is thy petition, Queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? It shall be performed, even if it be half of the kingdom."

Then the queen answered, "If I have found favour in thy sight, oh, king! let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we are sold, I and my people, to be killed. If we had

only been sold for slaves, I would have held my peace and said nothing."

Then Ahasuerus said to Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, that dares presume in his heart to do this?"

And Esther answered, "The enemy is this wicked Haman."

The king was too angry to reply to her at first. He went out furious into the palace garden.

When Haman saw this, he grew very frightened, for he felt very sure that the king would not spare him, and he began to beg the queen not to take his life. At this moment, Ahasuerus returned from the garden. Haman, who, as I told you, was a great coward, was on his knees before Queen Esther. But there could be no pardon for him, he had had no pity for others, and now he must expect none to be shown to him. One of the chamberlains said before the king, "There is a gallows, fifty cubits high, standing in Haman's house, which he had put up for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king."

Then Ahasuerus said, "Hang Haman thereon."

So they took Haman and hanged him on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. Haman's fine house was given to Esther, and she brought Mordecai before her royal husband, as now there was no reason for keeping it a secret that he was her relation. Then the king took off the ring which he had taken back from the wicked Haman, and gave it to Mordecai.

Now Esther had a beautiful palace of her own, so she did not want Haman's fine house for herself. I dare say you can guess what she did with it? She gave it, of course, to the good Mordecai to live in.

Esther had still work to do. You remember, I hope, that Haman had sent out letters (sealed with the king's seal) all through the kingdom, saying that the Jews were to be killed on a certain day. So Esther again came to the king, threw herself on the ground before him, and with tears in her eyes, begged him to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite.

Ahasuerus did not like to see his beloved Esther weeping at his feet, so he held out the golden sceptre, and she rose up and stood before the king. She asked him to send out other letters all over the kingdom to say that Haman's cruel orders were not to be obeyed—the Jews were not to be slain. It was not enough for her that she and Mordecai had gained Ahasuerus' favour, she wanted to have her people saved and happy. Listen to her words,—“For how can I bear to see the evil that will come upon my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?” (Kindred means relations.)

Then the king said, “You know it is a law of our country that what is once written and sealed with the king's seal, no one can alter. The order sent by Haman cannot be recalled, but you can save your people by writing now whatever letters you like in my name, and seal them with my seal.”

So Esther and Mordecai did as Ahasuerus said. His scribes were set to work, and

letters were sent out everywhere through the provinces, telling the Jews to gather themselves together and stand for their lives. If anyone attacked them, they had permission to kill them and take anything that belonged to them for spoil. So the posts went out, being hurried by the king's command.

Then Mordecai left Ahasuerus' presence, dressed in garments of blue and white, with a large golden crown upon his head, and a robe of fine linen and purple. And the people in Shushan rejoiced and were glad.

No one felt sorry for the fate of Haman, the Jews' enemy. He had been too proud and cruel to make real friends, so when his day of trouble came, he had none to help him. Take warning, dear children, by the story of Haman. Some of you may happen to be in a better position than others. One of you boys, for instance, may be the head of your class at school. Be sure you are never tyrants over the younger or weaker ones. If you have power, use it wisely. Then God, who sees and watches

us all—for “the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the good and the evil” *—will be pleased, and “the light of his countenance will shine upon you.”

* PROVERBS xv., 3.

CHAPTER LXIV.

PURIM.

ESTHER ix.

Now the day which Haman had fixed on to kill all the Jews, I think I told you before, was the thirteenth of our Jewish month Adar. This day, when the Jews' enemies were to have had power to do what they liked to them, drew near. But now Esther's people had nothing to fear, for Ahasuerus, the mighty king, was their friend, and many of the people of the land became Jews, because they were afraid of them.

The memorable day arrived, and the Jews gathered themselves together in the different cities to be ready to defend their

lives, for there were many who, like Haman, hated the Jews, and took advantage of the first letters that had been sent out sealed with the king's ring. But the Jews were stronger than their enemies, for all the rulers and officers of the king helped the Jews, because they were afraid of offending Mordecai.

"For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame had gone out through all the provinces."*

So the Jews, in defending themselves, killed numbers of their enemies, but although Ahasuerus had told them they might seize whatever they liked, they would not take any spoil of what belonged to the people of the land.

Haman's ten sons were hanged on the gallows which their father had set up for Mordecai, and on which he had died himself.

The next day, the fourteenth of Adar, the Jews had rest from their dangers, so there was feasting and gladness through all their

* ESTHER ix., 4.

homes, and they made presents to each other, and sent gifts to the poor of their people. And Mordecai sent letters all over Ahasuerus' one hundred and twenty-seven provinces to the Jews living in them, telling them that every year they were to keep these days as days of rejoicing and gratitude to God for saving them from Haman. They were to remember the good Queen Esther, how, through her courage, their sorrow and fear had been turned into joy, and their mourning into gladness.

This time of feasting and charity was to be called "Purim," because of the "Pur" or lot that was cast to settle the day for destroying all the Jews in Ahasuerus' kingdom. Then the Jews promised Mordecai and Esther always to keep Purim throughout their generations, so now you know why *we* keep the feast of Purim. Not only should we be merry and happy ourselves, but we must remember our poor friends, and, according to what we can spare, we must give to them, so as to try and let them also have a happy Purim.

Now we have spoken of the *feast* of Purim, perhaps some of you do not know there is, besides, the *fast* of Purim, called, generally, the "Fast of Esther." Some religious people fast on the thirteenth of Adar, the day before Purim, in memory of Queen Esther's fast, before she entreated the king to save her nation.

The story of all these things was written down in the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Persia. And Mordecai continued in high favour with Ahasuerus, so that he became greater and greater. He was next after the king; but with all this he never forgot his own people, but did everything that he could for their good, so that the Jews in Persia were very happy in the time of Ahasuerus and Esther.

CHAPTER LXV

JOB, THE PATIENT MAN.

JOB i., 2.

Now, I dare say, dear children, you have often heard people say, "Oh, he has the patience of Job," or "It is enough to try the patience of Job." Well, have you ever taken the trouble to ask who was Job? I do not fancy you know much about him, so I will tell you.

Job was a very rich man, richer than any of the people about him. He lived in "the land of Uz." He had farms, and cattle, and plenty of servants. He was very good. He feared God and did nothing wicked. He was loved by every one, for any one who was in trouble could come to Job and

know that he would help him. He did not keep his riches to himself, but gave of them to any who were in want. The widow and the orphan blessed him, for he was their friend. Job had a wife and seven sons and three daughters. Everything went as he wished. So he was very happy, and as he loved God truly, he thanked Him daily for all the blessings he enjoyed.

But suddenly all this changed. God was going to try His servant, and see if he would still be faithful if He took from him what made life pleasant. So troubles came thick and fast. He was sitting in his house one day, when a servant rushed in and said to him, "While your oxen were ploughing, and the asses feeding beside them, some savage neighbours set upon them, carried them away, and killed all the servants who were in charge of them. I only am escaped."

This was but the beginning of Job's misfortunes, for while the messenger was still speaking, another came up and said, "The

fire of God has fallen from heaven, and burnt up all your sheep, and the servants who took care of them; I only am escaped to tell you."

While he was yet speaking, another man arrived, saying, "Some bands of Chaldeans (a strange people) have come up and seized all your camels, and carried them away, after killing all your servants; I am the only one who has escaped."

This was all bad enough for Job. He found he had lost all his cattle and servants, he was no longer rich; but the worst was now to come, for at this moment, a fourth messenger appeared, with this terrible news—"As your sons and daughters were feasting at their eldest brother's house, there came a great wind from the wilderness round the four corners of the house. The house has fallen in, and they are all dead."

When Job heard these dreadful words, he rose from his seat and tore his clothes; but not one murmur against God passed from his lips. He said, "The Lord hath

given, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."*

God, who gives us everything we have, can at any time take it from us, and we all ought to feel like Job, that whatever He does is well done. Mind, I do not tell you that Job was not very unhappy, that would have been impossible, but he loved God so truly, that he just bowed his head and blessed Him, knowing that whatever God had done must be right.

You will think there could be no more troubles in store for Job, but there was another still to come to try his faith. As yet, nothing had happened to him himself; but now his body was covered with sore boils from head to foot. He was full of pain and suffering, and he sat down in his misery on the ground, among the ashes. At this wretched sight, his wife lost all patience and faith in God, so instead of comforting her husband, she said, "How can you still praise God; what is there now left for you but to die?"

* JOB i., 21.

But Job's love of God was too true to be shaken even by this ; he said, " You speak like one of the foolish women. What ! shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord and shall we not receive evil ? "

What a beautiful feeling of Job's ! Have we any of us a right to expect nothing but favour from God ? Are we any of us so good that we do not deserve punishment sometimes ? This was Job's thought, therefore, in his sore trouble, he did not murmur against God's dealings with him.

CHAPTER LXVI.

JOB'S THREE FRIENDS.

JOB ii.

Now there were three men, who had been great friends of Job. Their names were Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. When they heard of all that had happened to Job, they made an appointment together to go and mourn with him, to comfort him. When they reached his house, and saw the dreadful condition he was in, so covered with sores that they did not know him, they lifted up their voices and wept, and each one rent his clothes. Then they sat down with him on the ground, but none spoke a word, for they saw that his grief was great.

They acted wisely in leaving him alone, and after seven days Job opened his lips. Sad and bitter were his words. He felt his life was more than he could bear; he longed for death, and he begged God to take him away.

“My soul is weary of life,” he said.*

Then his friends were vexed with him, and told him it was not right to speak in such a manner. But Job told them they were poor comforters, and had better leave him; and again he asked God to let him die. He longed for a happier life, the life which lasts for ever, which we may all hope for, if we do but earn it. He told his friends that “he knew his body would return to the dust, but that he should see God;” † he said, “For I know that my Redeemer liveth.” ‡

Still his three foolish friends tried to reason with him; they wanted him to think that his troubles were a punishment from God, whilst he felt sure that they were only meant for a trial, and he was

* JOB x., 1. † JOB xxi., 26. ‡ JOB xxi., 25.

very angry with his friends; "Miserable comforters are ye all," * he said.

Then a fourth friend came forward, but his words were not of much use either. He blamed Job's friends for the manner in which they had spoken; he began by saying, "I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and dared not show you my opinion."

Still he brought no more comfort to poor Job than the other three friends had, for he too wanted to persuade Job, that he must have deserved his misfortunes, or they would not have been sent.

Then God's voice was heard from out of a whirlwind. He himself answered Job, and reminded him of all His mighty deeds, how He had created everything in the Universe, and He asked him what he had to say.

On hearing God's words, Job acknowledged how weak and poor a thing he was; he said, "I know that Thou canst do anything, and that no thought can be hidden from Thee." †

* JOB xvi., 1. † JOB xlii., 2:

When God saw how truly humble Job was, He said to Eliphaz, "I am angry with thee and thy two friends, for ye have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has. So now go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job shall pray for you, lest I punish you for your folly."

So Job's three friends went and did as God commanded them, and the Lord accepted their offering. Then the Lord turned all Job's troubles away from him, when he prayed for his friends, and God gave him twice as much as he had before. All his friends and relations came and ate bread with him in his house to comfort him for the sorrow that God had brought upon him, and each one gave him a present of money and jewels.

So you see that the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his early ones. Again he had seven sons and three daughters, and sheep, and oxen, and camels, and asses. And in all the land there were

no women to be found so beautiful as Job's three daughters.

After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons and his grandsons grow up about him. "So Job died very old and full of days."

Now, my dear children, I need not say that the lesson I want you to learn from the story of Job is—patience. Whatever trouble or pain you are in, try to be patient, have faith in God as Job had, then God will help you, and you will be strong to bear your unhappiness. I don't think I can better finish this little book, which it has been a great pleasure to me to write for you, than with this little sort of a moral. I wish to bid you a happy, cheerful good-bye, but still I want you to remember that sorrow often also comes to us, not as a punishment, but only as a trial, and if you think of this, you will, I am sure, never murmur at troubles, for "Whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth,"* and by your patience you will earn a rich reward at God's hands.

* PROVERBS iii., 12.

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